University of Alberta

Alcohol and Dissent: Drunkenness in the Writings of Venedikt Erofeev and Jack Kerouac

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Comparative Literature

Edmonton, Alberta
Fall 2006

Library and Archives Canada

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Direction du Patrimoine de l'édition

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-22180-8
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-22180-8

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Abstract

This thesis examines how alcohol is used as a site of dissent in the texts of Venedikt Erofeev and Jack Kerouac. The thesis proposes that the meaning of alcohol consumption is socially constructed by the dominant culture and alternative and oppositional meanings are possible. By situating the works examined in their respective socio-historical contexts, the thesis looks at how alcohol opens a possibility of resistance in the texts and to what extent it succeeds. In the case of Erofeev and Soviet Russia, alcohol creates carnival, which liberates language and allows a multitude of voices to coexist equally, without privileging any one of them. In the case of Kerouac and the United States, the counterculture fuelled by alcohol is successful at first but ultimately fails because the dominant culture reduces the opposition to the individual level, thus robbing it of any social potential.

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Note on Translation

There are several English translations of Venedikt Erofeev's Moskva-Petushki. They vary in quality, with the best one in my opinion being Moscow Stations by Stephen Mulrine. The difficulty in translating the novel lies in its use of different types of language (such as official slogans, literary quotations, popular slang) as well as puns and references which would be recognizable to the Russian reader. The numerous quotations and references in the text are part of the Soviet-Russian culture and the immediacy of recognition would be lost in the translation into another language and culture. The translation of Erofeev's play, Val'purgieva Noch', ili Shagi Komandora: Tragediia v Piati Aktah, rendered by Alexander Burry and Tatiana Tulchinsky as Walpurgis Night, or "The Steps of the Commander," runs into the same problems. The translators try to capture the different rhythms of various types of languages used in the text but they understandably cannot convey the place of those rhythms and phrases in Soviet-Russian culture.

Throughout this thesis I will use my own translations for Russian quotations for both the primary texts and the secondary sources. Since I work from original Russian texts, in my own translations of quotations I try to convey the meaning crucial to my interpretation. Although the translations are available, they at times sacrifice certain meanings for the sake of clarity in English or, in case of Erofeev's play, to reproduce the rhythm of the language faithfully.

Introduction

The main idea of this thesis is that the meanings of alcohol consumption are socially constructed and, therefore, drinking can become a site of dissent against the dominant culture. To investigate the oppositional possibilities of alcohol consumption, I look at two writers for whom drinking is central as a theme – Venedikt Erofeev and Jack Kerouac. Erofeev, an underground writer in the Soviet Union of the 1970s, and Kerouac, an American writer of the Beat Generation in the 1950s and 60s, are both countercultural figures and their writings are associated with subversion of the dominant ideologies in their respective societies. I wish to look, then, at what role alcohol plays in the subversive strategies of their writings and to what extent those strategies succeed.

My approach to the topic is, first of all, based on the view of literature as a social artifact. Art exists within society and is "inevitably social" (Haslett 15) and, consequently, ideological. Raymond Williams writes that "we cannot separate literature and art from other kinds of social practice, in such a way as to make them subject to quite special and distinct laws. They may have quite specific features as practices, but they cannot be separated from the general social process" (13). As a consequence of this view of literature, I will be primarily concerned with situating Erofeev's and Kerouac's writings within a particular social and historical view of alcoholism before explicating how they subvert the dominant conceptualization of drinking. My understanding of the socio-historical

context can be termed Marxist in a sense that it depends on a view of society derived from the writings of Marxist theorists, primarily Antonio Gramsci, Stuart Hall, and Raymond Williams. Following Gramsci, Hall and Williams have a more nuanced view of social practices and of the superstructure that is not reducible to base. For my purposes, I draw from their theories of ideology and of the dominant culture.

Ideology is a way of making sense of social practices and relations and making them coherent (Hall, "Culture" 322). It is a lived relation between self and the world, a way of conceptualizing reality, and it is dependent on one's social and economic position. Ideology produces knowledge and what is known as "common sense," which is the domain of the dominant ideology; the dominant ideology constitutes a sense of reality for most people. Williams writes that "in any particular period there is a central system of practices, meanings and values, which we can properly call dominant and effective" (9). This view does not presuppose that the dominant class simply coerces the dominated to accept its views. Rather, it draws on Gramsci's notion of hegemony. The dominant class, according to Gramsci, is an alliance of fractions that he calls a historical bloc; it is not one monolithic group or class. The historical bloc rules through a combination of coercion and consent. Hegemony emerges out of the dominance inherent in the social structures and out of the manufacture of consent so that the dominant ideology (that which favors the historical bloc) becomes common sense:

> hegemony supposes the existence of something which is truly total, which is not merely secondary or superstructural, like the weak sense of ideology, but which is lived at such a depth, which saturates the society to such an extent, and which, as Gramsci put it, even constitutes the limit of common sense for most people under its sway. (Williams 8)

Hegemony operates on the level of superstructures through ideology but penetrates much deeper than a simple notion of an imposed ideology. It is a conceptualization of reality which has become naturalized and which is accepted by the subordinate groups. Hegemony allows the dominant class factions to select definitions of reality from the many systems of meanings which are favorable to them and which are institutionalized in the social organization: "what then constitutes the 'dominance' of these dominant meanings and practices are the mechanisms which allow it to select, incorporate and therefore also exclude elements in 'the full range of human practice'" (Hall, "Culture" 332). These definitions "come to constitute the primary 'lived reality' as such for the subordinate classes" (Hall, "Culture" 332-33). The ruling bloc succeeds in "*framing* all competing definitions of reality *within their range*, bringing all alternatives within their horizon of thought" (Hall, "Culture" 333). Hegemony, then, is a non-coercive way of shaping and producing consent.

Ideological hegemony is dynamic in that it must be actively won and secured. It has elements of constant change and exists in what Gramsci calls an

unstable equilibrium -- the counterhegemonic forces never disappear and the ruling bloc is "required to make to win [sic] consent and legitimacy" continually (Hall, "Culture" 334). The dominated classes have their own forms of social life, which can be used counter-hegemonically to develop a revolutionary consciousness. Because hegemony has to be actively won, it can also be lost (Hall, "Culture" 333). The subordinated classes can become strong enough to organize themselves around the oppositional counter-hegemonic meanings. But these same meanings, if the dominated class is not strong enough, can be used to reinforce subordination. This is done through incorporation of the counter-hegemonic meanings into the dominant meanings in order to reinforce the hegemony of the dominant class.

Drawing on Gramsci's notion of hegemony, Williams develops a theory of oppositional and alternative meanings and how they function in relation to the dominant ideology. One of the main features of hegemony is a process of selective incorporation – certain meanings are chosen and incorporated into the dominant ideology while others are excluded. The meanings which are excluded constitute a whole range of alternative and oppositional meanings. If the alternative or oppositional meanings do not threaten the dominant ideology, they are tolerated and accommodated. Some meanings become incorporated into dominant meaning. These meanings are "reinterpreted, diluted, or put into forms which support or at least do not contradict other elements within the effective dominant culture" (Williams 9). The dominant system must continually "make

and remake itself so as to 'contain' those meanings, practices and values which are oppositional to it" (Hall, "Culture" 331-32). If it does not, then the oppositional meanings can succeed in replacing it. Williams draws a distinction between oppositional and alternative meanings – alternative meanings are simply a different way to think and do not imply an element of social change; oppositional meanings are more political in a sense that they include an element of societal change (11). This is the difference between the individual who subverts the dominant ideology privately and the social group which can acquire a revolutionary potential.

The alternative and oppositional meanings depend on historical variation – in some societies the possibility of opposition and its articulation are much better than in others. In Williams's example of literature, the Marxist tradition of the Soviet Union sees literature as a crucial activity, so that writers and writings are under much more scrutiny than in the United States where, if the literature is not profitable or widely circulated, it is overlooked for a time, at least while it is merely alternative and not oppositional. The possibilities of articulation of oppositional meanings in these two cases depend on several factors. In the Soviet Union, literature is under direct state control and the articulation of oppositional meaning becomes very problematic. On the other hand, the existence of a clearly articulated and visible dominant ideology allows for a better conceptualization of opposition than in a society such as the United States, where the hegemony is much more flexible for the accommodation of alternative meanings which can

then be presented in a way which reinforces the hegemony rather than challenges it. In the United States, then, the artist seemingly has much more freedom in the articulation of dissent and, as long as he remains mostly unknown and invisible, he can be left alone. However, once his work acquires an oppositional meaning, rather than an alternative one, and once it acquires a possibility of mediating social action, it can become absorbed into the dominant ideology and, thus, neutralized. The oppositional meanings are recast in terms which are favorable to the dominant bloc.

There are two types of oppositional meanings according to Williams – residual and emergent forms: "By 'residual' I mean that some experiences, meanings and values which cannot be verified or cannot be expressed in the terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practiced on the basis of the residue – cultural as well as social – of some previous social formation" (10). These meanings may become incorporated into the dominant culture both because the dominant culture also contains the residue of the past and because alternative residual meanings cannot be left alone lest they start threatening the interpretations of the past offered by the dominant culture. The emergent meanings are new practices that are being created. There is an early attempt by the dominant culture to incorporate them because they are part "of effective contemporary practice" (Williams 11). The residual oppositional meanings threaten from the past while the emergent threaten from the present. Both the residual and emergent meanings can be partially incorporated into the dominant

meanings or "they may be left as a deviation or enclave which varies from, without threatening, the central emphases" (Hall, "Culture" 332). Societies attempt to incorporate oppositional meanings at various degrees; culture, as I have already mentioned, must be constantly changing if it is to remain dominant. The selectivity of dominant meanings excludes many other meanings but the interests of the dominant culture may extend over to those areas which are excluded. The meanings in those areas will be either incorporated or obliterated.

This then is the broad theoretical perspective from which I approach the subject matter of alcoholism in the writings of Erofeev and Kerouac. On a more specific level, my view of alcoholism is in line with the theoretical framework used here. Alcoholism in modern society is considered to be a deviant activity – it is problematized through different approaches, such as the medical, sociological, or psychological paradigms. The principal idea for this thesis, though, is that the concept of alcoholism is a socially constructed category -- drinking is interpreted by the dominant culture. The meaning of drinking is ideological and, as such, can provide a way of opposition through subversion of the dominant construction of alcohol consumption.

While drinking is part of everyday life, it can also be seen as undesirable. But prior to about two hundred years ago, alcoholism was not conceptualized as a problem. The modern view of alcoholism as a disease goes back only as far as the late eighteenth century. According to Marc Redfield and Janet Farrell Brodie

> this sudden pathologization and criminalization of habit [...] occurred as part of the emergence, on the one hand, of a disciplinary society in which typologies of deviance play a significant role in the operations of power, and, on the other hand, of a society of consumption in which identities and desires become attuned to the repetitive seriality of commodity production. (4)

The modern articulation of addiction and its pathology has occurred during a major shift in the societal organization: "the addict emerged as part of the advent of technologized, bureaucratized, disciplinary society of consumption, in which power becomes what Foucault termed 'biopower' – power articulated in and through the surveillance and training of bodies" (Redfield 6). Alcoholism as a disease, however, is very difficult to define. It is placed somewhere between addiction and habit but, as Mariana Valverde notes, no definitions of alcoholism, whether they are based on psychological or biological paradigms, make any reference to the amount of alcohol ingested (28). There is no evidence that a certain amount of alcohol is the threshold of addiction. Today anthropologists acknowledge that the disease model of drinking is socially constructed – alcoholism as an addiction and a progressive disease is only one of many ways to conceptualize drinking. Drinking is part of most cultural traditions and how a society regards drinking is a construct based on societal ideology and structures. Pertti Alasuutari, in his study on the cultural theory of alcoholism, distinguishes between two conceptual frames for drinking – the alcoholism frame and the

everyday-life frame. In the everyday-life frame, drinking is understood through the social context, focusing on "the place and functions of drinking in social interaction" (1). In the alcoholism frame, in contrast, the focus shifts "from the situation to individuals and their drinking habits or style" (2). This division in conceptual frames highlights the difficulty of conceptualizing drinking and its split position between the dominant and oppositional meanings. There are two frames of conceptualizing drinking because drinking is not inherently problematic but only becomes so in certain contexts. In the everyday-life frame drinking is tolerated and is in line with the hegemonic meanings, while in the alcoholism frame drinking acquires the possibility of an oppositional meaning and is problematized. The everyday-life frame also takes into account the selected traditions in which alcohol plays a role and which reinforce the hegemonic structures – such as celebratory drinking at a wedding, for example. Furthermore, alcohol is an important part of the economy – it is profitable and, therefore, an outright ban on alcohol is undesirable both in capitalism and in Soviet communism.

The alcoholism frame is constructed to contain the excessive drinker who evades hegemonic control rather than the social drinker whose consumption of alcohol falls in line with the dominant ideology. To maintain control over the people, modern society encourages individuals to self-regulate (to various degrees, depending on the historical and social context) and to adhere to social codes. A major part of self-regulation is played by the body which is inscribed

with dominant meanings: "the body is where the power-bearing definitions of social and sexual normality are, literally, embodied, and is consequently the site of discipline and punishment for deviation from those norms" (Fiske 90). The body becomes a site of struggle between the dominant and oppositional meanings. Constructions of drinking are part of the apparatuses of social control and discourses which are put in place to control the "meanings and behaviors of the body" (Fiske 90). Following this articulation of social control, John Fiske theorizes a possibility of evasion and subversion by means of what he calls offensive bodies. The body can become a site of resistance through the strategies of excessive pleasures – pleasures which threaten the social control because they cannot be contained. Historically, these social threats posed by the body, such as "drunkenness, sexuality, idleness, rowdiness," belong to the subordinated groups and "disciplinary, if not repressive, action is almost inevitable" (75). While Fiske's theories draw on the Marxist tradition, they move in the populist direction, allowing for resistance to become private where strategies of subversion can be localized in the individual bodies. Fiske is useful, though, because he brings in the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin and his notion of the carnivalesque. In Rabelais and His World, Bakhtin introduces his theory of carnival, which is a rupture in the dominant world order where the culture from below, the people's culture, can express its own world view. Carnival is characterized by excess, laughter, offensiveness. It is a world without social hierarchies where many voices are allowed equality. Importantly, Fiske does note that carnival is not concerned with

individual bodies but with the material body principle. Carnival operates on the level of society rather than of individuals. This aspect of carnival, however, is not well developed by Fiske for his theory of the offensive body. While Fiske is useful for my purposes here, I would like to highlight that oppositional meanings, such as those conveyed by offensive bodies, must exist on the level of social groups and must possess a revolutionary potential. If the offensive bodily strategies are confined to the level of the individual, they are merely alternative meanings and do not pose a threat to the hegemonic meanings. Alternative meanings can become oppositional only through the threat to the dominant meaning and that can come only through the potential for social action.

Alcohol can provide a site of resistance, a way of formulating an alternative ideology in a number of ways – by evading the social control of the body, by creating unproductive and excessive pleasures which subvert the dominant meanings, and by allowing the mental escape from social control, opening possibilities of formulations of alternative and oppositional meanings. The last point works on the level of language, which can be liberated by the alcohol. Language is a basic tool of ideology, since "all social life, every facet of social practice, is mediated by language" (Hall, "Culture" 328) and, therefore, is subject to hegemonic control. The meaning of language is conditioned and mediated by the interests of the dominant bloc. Alcohol frees language and allows other meanings to come through, thus creating a way of subversion and resistance.

To see how this potential of alcohol to create a site of resistance and opposition is realized in Erofeev and Kerouac, I will explore the role of alcohol in their writing.

For both Erofeev and Kerouac, I begin with the social context – the history of alcohol in their respective societies. My primary concern is with examining how successful are their strategies of subversion.

My point of departure is Erofeev and his underground novel Moskva-Petushki (Moscow-Petushki), the work for which he is primarily recognized. Not much is known about Erofeev's life. Most of what is available is sketchy and is partially fabricated by Erofeev himself so that fact and fiction (self-created and self-propagated) are indistinguishable. This is in part due to his clandestine status. But this lack of an extensive biography also has the side effect of allowing him to become a symbol and a legend. His writing, unhampered by his biography, can realize its subversive potential and become oppositional rather than an alternative view at the society. By all accounts, Erofeev, just like his namesake narrator Venichka, was a drinker of legendary proportions:

> Erofeev was [...] an alcoholic from his youth. His biographers tend to cast his drinking in the light of facilitating his genius and stress that his awe-inspiring feats of consumption did not noticeably affect his demeanor. Alcoholism, according to his friend Igor' Avdiev, was an integral part of Erofeev's character, a calling and a vocation. (Ryan-Hayes, Contemporary 62)

Erofeev died in 1990, at the age of thirty-two, from cancer of the throat. There had been suggestions that his death was caused by drinking, but they have never gained currency. He cannot be categorized as a typical alcoholic; his drinking achieved a mythological status creating an image of the alcoholic as a creative artist. Erofeev cultivated a public persona, mystifying his own biography; his claims have been proved to be untrue or wildly exaggerated. The link between the author and his narrator Venichka is established both by their shared name and by their shared propensity for alcohol but, in my reading of Erofeev's novel, I have not taken the author's biography into consideration. Instead, I have focused on the socio-historical context of the text.

Moskva-Petushki was written in 1969, but was not published in the Soviet Union until 1988-89 because of its themes and style, which were in direct opposition to the official style of art, socialist realism. Before its official publication, the novel circulated clandestinely in *samizdat* (literally, self-publishing), an underground reproduction and distribution of suppressed and dissident texts, and in *tamizdat*, publishing of smuggled manuscripts abroad (literally, there-publishing). The first publication of Moskva-Petushki was in Jerusalem (1973), followed by publication in Paris (1977). An English translation, titled Moscow to the End of the Line, appeared in 1980. The novel was finally published in the Soviet Union during the anti-alcohol campaign of the 1980s in the magazine Trezvost' i Kul'tura (Sobriety and Culture). Appearance of the novel in that publication mediated the text's interpretation as being against the

evils of alcoholism. Alcohol and its consumption are a central part of the narrative: Moskva-Petushki is narrated by Venichka, an alcoholic traveling on a train and drinking inordinate amounts of alcohol. At the end, he experiences what could be interpreted as hallucinations induced by delirium tremens and dies, ostensibly at the hands of four thugs. The text has only a minimal plot – Venichka traveling by train from Moscow to Petushki – but its progress can be traced along the trajectory of Venichka's progressive intoxication. Alcohol is the most prominent and, I argue, the most important motif in the novel. It is ever present -- from the narrator's search for the hair-of-the-dog at the beginning, through his drunken meditations on the nature of drinking, to a drinking symposium with other passengers, and finally to the horrifying lapse into the nightmarish delirium tremens. The novel is not a realistic representation of alcoholism. Rather, alcohol functions as a trope, which provides the means for dissent against Soviet ideology and culture. Through the language of an alcoholic, Erofeev creates a pocket of resistance, allowing hidden voices and the people's unofficial truth to be heard. Erofeev's writing is perfectly suited for a Bakhtinian analysis, which I will perform here. Moskva-Petushki's links to Bakhtin have already been noted by others. What I will do, however, is focus on the novel specifically and primarily through the lens of alcoholism, analyzing how alcohol is integral to the text's subversive status.

I will begin, thus, with the discussion of socialist realism and the role of alcohol in the society and literature of the Soviet Union. I will then define the

main features of Bakhtin's notion of carnival, stressing its ambivalence, heteroglossia, and social and communal nature. Drawing on Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia, I examine the language and form of the novel and how the alcoholic narrator evades linguistic control by the dominant culture through Moskva-Petushki's inherent dialogism which, mediated by the alcohol, allows the novel to challenge the monolithic conception of reality. Because of the dialogic nature of the text, I argue that any interpretation of the novel must also be dialogic, allowing a range of meanings to emerge, rather than monologic, which would impose a single ideological perspective on the work. The narrative resists any attempts at a monolithic interpretation which, because of the text's dialogism, cannot achieve internal cohesion and must, therefore, do violence to the work in the process of analysis. I also look at the role of travel in Moskva-Petushki, a major element in the novel, and its connection with alcohol. Here I discuss the concept of chronotope, a conceptualization of space and time, and how the work's chronotope functions in relation to the Stalinist chronotope of Soviet society. In conclusion, I briefly discuss another work by Erofeev's, the play Val'purgieva Noch' ili Shagi Commandora (Walpurgis Night or the Steps of the Commendatore), which has not enjoyed the same fame and popularity as his novel. The play, however, provides a continuation of similar themes and strategies used in Moskva-Petushki and is useful for the analysis here, especially since it revolves around another alcoholic, who is admitted to a psychiatric hospital due to his drinking.

In the second chapter of this thesis, I will examine the writings of Jack Kerouac using a comparative approach. In light of the discussion of Erofeev, I wish to explore how Kerouac's use of alcohol is different. The difference is grounded in the differences between the Soviet and the American societies and ideologies. I will then, as in the Erofeev chapter, begin with a discussion of the role of alcohol in American history and in the capitalist ideology. After a brief introduction to the Beat Generation, in order to situate Kerouac as a writer and as a countercultural figure, I turn to a discussion of the role of alcohol in Kerouac's writing. The point of departure for that is the theme of travel, the most evident element in his writings and one which has been most often discussed. I will link travel with alcohol consumption and examine how drinking adds another facet to the meaning of the car journey and how it creates subversive possibilities. Alcohol and travel in On the Road create oppositional meanings but those meanings are lost in Kerouac's later works – Big Sur and Satori in Paris – where Kerouac concedes that his drinking is problematic. To explain why this shift occurs, I argue that Kerouac's celebrity status after the publication of On the Road relegated his subversive potential to an individual level, thus barring any possibility of social action. By focusing on Kerouac as an outcast rebel and as an individual, the dominant culture has neutralized the oppositional meanings present in On the Road, influencing even Kerouac's own perception of self.

Although much has been written on both Erofeev and Kerouac, with this work I wish to examine them through a sociological perspective of the role of

literature and alcohol in society. Focusing on both writers through the lens of alcohol, and using a comparative approach, will allow me to better elucidate alcohol's potential as a site of resistance. Comparing the two writers, moreover, enables us to see to what extent the subversion is successful and how that success depends on the social and historical context.

Chapter 1: Venedikt Erofeev

The Soviet Union, unlike the liberal capitalist society in the United States, has a clear official ideology – that of Marxism-Leninism. This dominant ideology is not flexible enough to be able to contain and neutralize alternative voices and mostly silences them through coercion. Nevertheless, the consent of the populace is still gained and maintained through ideology and hegemony. Part of the hegemonic strategy in the Soviet Union is what Keith Livers calls the "fusion of private bodies and state ideology" (2). In Marxism-Leninism, humans are seen as social creatures whose subjectivity is created by the society. Thus the socialist utopia is projected onto the body – the dominant ideology is inscribed on the body politic. According to the official ideology, utopian social conditions should create a perfected human being; the body, however, still remains flawed and uncontrolled. Stalinist culture, then, "views the body with suspicion and distrust. The human organism, its products and by-products, are seen as the unscientific, unregulated work of a fundamentally flawed natural order" (Livers 111). Alcohol makes the body even more uncontrollable and, therefore, its intake must be regulated. But alcoholism remained a widespread phenomenon in the Soviet Union, permeating every level of society while being de facto condoned by the government through the sale of alcoholic beverages. In this chapter, I look at how the dominant bloc attempted to contain the ideological threat posed by alcohol

and how Erofeev's Moskva-Petushki subverts the social control and allows expression to other meanings.

Taken on a very literal and superficial level, there is no denying that alcohol is as ruinous to the body in Moskva-Petushki as it can be in reality. But the meaning of that bodily destruction depends on the ideological perspective; it can be seen as reclamation of control over one's body and resistance to the meanings inscribed onto it by society. While Venichka does ultimately die in the novel, alcohol is not portrayed in negative terms. The function of drinking in the novel is much more nuanced – it provides a site of resistance and socio-cultural critique and is a catalyst for the liberating forces of carnival. There are many critical works, memoirs, and articles both in Russian and in other languages about the novel. But it is important to approach the work critically through two lenses: the centrality of alcohol and its dialogical ambivalence. The connection between the novel and Bakhtin's theories is evident and has been pointed out before (see, for example, Monika Majewska's article). What is rarer, however, is the realization of the instability of any monologic interpretation. The pivotal role of drinking for the understanding of the novel and of its dialogic nature has also not been duly stressed. Alcohol is the element of the text which mitigates all other elements and meanings. To understand the role of alcohol in the novel and the text's countercultural elements, it is necessary to understand the place of alcohol in Soviet society as well as the Soviet literature of the time, to which I now turn.

The most important aspect of Soviet ideology for the novel is, of course, the official standard for art – socialist realism. During the Stalinist era, the official stance towards art was totalitarian "in the exact meaning of the word: official ideals and norms were applied to questions of content and style as to every other sphere of life" (Brandist 100). For my discussion of socialist realism, I will rely largely on the essay by Abram Tertz titled On Social Realism. Abram Tertz is the pseudonym of Andrei Sinyavsky, who was put on trial in 1966 for anti-Soviet activity as manifested in his writing. He and his essay were crucial to the post-Stalinist public debate on the nature and merits of socialist realism. Tertz's work is similar in its approach to social critique to those used by Bakhtin and Erofeev; it does not dismiss the official ideology but rather interacts with it dialogically. Tertz writes that "We have one aim – Communism; one philosophy – Marxism; one art – socialist realism" (175). In the Soviet totalitarian society all art had to conform to socialist realism, which was defined at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934 as

> the basic method of Soviet literature and literary criticism. It demands of the artist the truthful, historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development. Moreover, the truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic representation of reality must be linked with the task of ideological transformation and education of workers in the spirit of socialism. (qtd. in Tertz 148)

This definition highlights the contradictory and dual nature of socialist realism. The main goal of socialist realism quite simply was to glorify the ideals of communism. This led to the paradox that, while it strives to represent reality truthfully, socialist realism must also depict it ideally, as society marches towards the socialist utopia. Thus, socialist realism, like Marxism, is teleological. N. S. Khrushchev writes that "the highest socialist destiny of art and literature is to mobilize the people to the struggle for new advances in the building of Communism" (qtd. in Tertz 164). Consequently, the consciousness of the reader must be transformed in order to approach more closely the ideal of Communism -- the ideal "toward which truthfully represented reality ascends in an undeviating revolutionary movement" (Tertz 150). This teleological ascent highlights another contradiction of socialist realism. The reality it depicts is interpreted through a double vision -- looking backward at the mythical glories of the Revolutionary struggle and forward to the utopian future while attempting to preserve the status quo. Thus, the present reality is conceptualized through the idealization of the past and of the future.

The most prominent and defining feature of the socialist realist novel is the positive hero, whom Leonid Leonov defines as "a peak of humanity from whose height the future can be seen" (qtd. in Tertz 172). The positive hero is not a mere human but a deindividualized symbol. At first he might be uncertain of his ideological convictions but he soon metamorphoses into an ideal man of the communist future. He is now firm in his ideological convictions and "for him

there are no inner doubts and hesitations, no unanswerable questions, and no impenetrable secrets. Faced with the most complex of tasks, he easily finds the solution – by taking the shortest and most direct route to the Purpose" (Tertz 173), which is of course the ushering in of the Communist utopia. The socialist realist novel does not dwell on an inner life of the hero as he is depersonalized and his psychology is not explored. Instead, the socialist realist hero, in a sort of variation on a *Bildungsroman*, achieves higher consciousness and becomes an emblem for an ideal.

The Purpose which drives the positive hero is another crucial element of socialist realism. While the positive hero appears in many guises in the development of the socialist realist novel – as a revolutionary martyr, as a *rukovoditel'* (an organization leader), as a worthy scientist -- the Purpose remains constant. Tertz writes that "works produced by socialist realists vary in style and content. But in all of them the Purpose is present" (167). This same idea of Purpose can be redefined through the concept of a chronotope, as is done by Katerina Clark. A chronotope, described by Bakhtin in "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," is an "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (Dialogic 84). Clark correctly points out that the concept of chronotope can be applied not only to literature but also to cultures and ideologies, since they are all narratives. The chronotope in a novel reflects the chronotope of the society or how the society conceptualizes reality and time and space. Thus, the ideology of the Soviet Union

operates within a certain dominant chronotope which is reflected in and propagated by the officially sanctioned art.

The chronotope, for Bakhtin, has a generic specificity – it is the chronotope used within the novel that defines the novel's genre. So the particular chronotope of socialist realism is another distinguishing feature of a socialist realist novel and it brings together the other two features: the Purpose and the positive hero. As I have mentioned, the socialist realist art as it was codified in the 1930s had to reaffirm the status quo through a dual function of glorifying the revolutionary past while affirming the future progress towards the communist ideal (K. Clark, "Political" 232). It is the role of the positive hero to mediate between these three temporal dimensions. In his leap from his present day potential to the interpersonal symbolic level, the hero becomes a representation of the glorious future. In terms of space, the chronotope of the Stalinist novel presents a setting which is a microcosm of the larger Soviet society. The setting is usually an ordinary locale isolated from its surroundings (K. Clark, "Political" 233), thus allowing both realism and symbolism at once.

In terms of style, socialist realism is marked by restraint or what Tertz calls a "pompous simplicity of style, the hallmark of classicism" (207-8). Socialist realism is conservative and shuns all experimentation. This is exactly what Tertz laments when he writes that art cannot stand eclecticism: it is impossible to produce good art while combining disparate elements (a positive hero who is also psychologically realistic; elevated style and high ideal with prosaic representation

of ordinary life). Tertz argues that socialist realism must resolve its contradictions – the contradictions discussed earlier and the contradictions inherent in the very term "socialist realism." In order to express the ideal, realism should be abandoned and fantasy and imagination should be given more freedom: "Right now I put my hope in a phantasmagoric art, with hypotheses instead of a Purpose, an art in which the grotesque will replace realistic descriptions of ordinary life. Such an art would correspond best to the spirit of our time" (Tertz 218). It is exactly this phantasmagoric quality which distinguishes Moskva-Petushki from the official literature, even if the novel still has some features of socialist realism. The grotesque and the fantastic elements in the Erofeev's novel are linked directly to the narrator's drinking and are clearly subversive given the requirements of solemnity and "realism" in the official art.

Unlike Venichka in Moskva-Petushki, the positive hero of the socialist realist novel does not drink. The people in socialist realist novels exemplify the Soviet ideal: "They do not curse, they do not fight, they do not drink themselves senseless the way the Russian people used to do. And if they take a drink at a wedding table covered with exquisite foods, it is only as an accompaniment of toasts" (Tertz 209). Soviet life was highly politicized, with the state attempting to regulate all social activity, including drinking. Following the official Soviet ideology of Marxism-Leninism, which holds that human beings are social and perfectible, any deviance is a product of the social context and a change in societal conditions will lead to a change in behavior. Therefore, as the society

changes en route to the communist utopia and as it approximates the ideal more and more, Soviet man needs no drink and neither does the positive hero. Despite this official ideology, however, drinking was widespread and commonplace in the Soviet Union with the members of the Party equally affected. In the late 20s, for example, a third of all the disciplinary cases of Party members was "associated with alcohol" (White 22). There were several attempts to reconcile the reality with the ideology. When the Bolsheviks gained power in Russia in the Revolution of 1917, they set out to end the capitalist system and the social problems it generated. One of these problems was alcoholism, which was seen by the Bolsheviks as a means for the capitalist class to control the workers. In a capitalist society, alcohol both kept the workers unconscious of or indifferent to their position, and effectively drained their meager income. Thus, after the revolution of 1905, "leftist circles accused the government and the capitalists of making drunkards of the workers and peasants to achieve financial and political advantage" (Segal 15). Alcoholism was objected to on ideological grounds rather than due to a causal link to crime and social deviance.

After the revolution of 1917, alcohol was officially seen as a remnant of bourgeois decadence and of the capitalist subjugation of the working class – "criminal deviance, alcoholism, etc. in the contemporary USSR are viewed as 'survivals of capitalism,' in the sense that the *socialist* system contains none of the 'inevitably' deviance-generating elements of the capitalist social order which preceded it" (Connor 15). A Soviet citizen who attained class consciousness did

not drink. Soviet man must be "sober, methodical, industrious, committed to productive work and participation in the public life of Soviet society" (Connor 43). Nevertheless, the society was still on its way to the communist ideal and, therefore, problems with wide-spread alcoholism were explained as lag in consciousness. As Boris Segal writes, "For a long time Soviet authors emphatically identified the causes of drinking and alcoholism as the 'survival of capitalism in the people's consciousness' and as 'bad customs'" (377). Because the Marxist-Leninist ideology views people as socially conditioned, alcohol pointed out a contradiction in that ideology. A communist society is supposed to be free of contradictions, since they are a consequence of class struggle which has now been eliminated. The continuous presence of social problems, such as alcoholism, was explained in individual terms, shifting the responsibility from the society to the individual. This strategy is similar to the capitalist strategy of relegating subversive practices to the individual level, thus effectively disarming them of any revolutionary potential.

Several campaigns to eradicate alcoholism were introduced during the history of the Soviet Union. They focused on education and propaganda in addition to banning sale of alcoholic beverages:

> the Party Programme of 1919 [. . .] committed the new regime to an urgent struggle with 'social diseases' like tuberculosis, syphilis and alcoholism. Unlike capitalist countries, Lenin explained in 1921, in which spirits and 'narcotics of the same kind' were

> allowed to circulate freely, a socialist government would not contemplate a trade that would lead Russia 'back to capitalism and not forward to communism.' (White 16)

But, despite the efforts of the authorities, alcohol consumption soared and, after prohibitions in 1914 and 1923, the trade in alcohol resumed due to its fiscal importance. During the initial years of the Soviet government, the consumption of alcohol went down only because of the general shortage of goods; illicit alcohol production continued. The government soon recognized that its efforts to curb alcohol consumption were failing, while it was deprived of a much needed income (White 22). The government resumed its monopoly on alcohol and the anti-alcoholism movement took on an educational rather than a prohibitive tone. A "Society for the Struggle against Alcoholism" was set up to educate people about the harms (social and personal) of drinking. Then, in 1932, alcoholism was medically reinterpreted in terms of individual psychology. This allowed the focus to shift away from the social conditions that produce alcoholism to the level of individual pathology and "the theme of alcoholism disappeared from the press, and no more statistics on the production and sale of alcohol were published" (White 25). This shift in how alcoholism was conceptualized was to allow the maximization of the production of alcohol to increase revenues without the problem of explaining why alcohol was allowed if it is a remnant of the capitalist society. Despite the official image of the communist hero, the production and consumption of alcohol were rising and any criticism of the decision to increase

the production of vodka "was to be regarded as a 'crude political mistake'" (White 27). Meanwhile the struggle with alcoholism continued but the main emphasis was placed on propaganda and on punishing public drunkenness (White 59). Officially, alcoholism could not remain a social problem because it was only a passing remnant of the previous regime; so it became an individual pathology. By the time Erofeev wrote Moskva-Petushki, the official statistics became silent on the use of alcohol, which was a common way of dealing with statistics problematic for the regime (White 32). This paradoxical status of alcohol – both ideologically undesirable and de facto condoned – resulted in a situation where drinking could be both subversive and commonplace.

Due to the official stance on alcohol in the Soviet Union and due to alcohol's paradoxical status in that society, drinking provides a potential site of resistance which is exploited in Moskva-Petushki. In the novel alcohol highlights the gap or opposition between the official ideology and the reality. The alcoholic narrator is a sort of holy fool or a jester telling the truth through his drunken ravings. Venichka's connection with the Russian tradition of i*urodstvo* (holy-foolishness) has been noted and discussed by Svetlana Gaiser-Shnitman and others, usually in the context of a Christian allegory. Igor' Suhih describes Venichka as a "современный юродивый, для которого похабство становится формой святости, способом обнаружения ненормальности 'нормальной' советской жизни" ("contemporary holy fool, for whom indecency becomes a form of holiness, a method to reveal the abnormality of the 'normal'

Soviet life"). The holy fool has traditionally been seen as a realization of the image of God in man. Thus, the fool was allowed to transgress social and religious codes; the fool had the right "to be 'other' in this world" (Bakhtin, Dialogic 159). Because the fool is not of this world and stands between the official and the people's culture, he is in a position to reveal that which is hidden and both Venichka and the novel itself expose the contradictions in the Soviet society. On a literal level, through its focus on drinking, the novel shows the reality which contradicts the official reality of the impending communist utopia. Furthermore, the novel constantly juxtaposes the reality which must conform to dialectical materialism with the need for a more metaphysical experience. In a world where history is predetermined, alcohol becomes a substitute for mystery and spirituality, as Venichka addresses God:

> Но разве это мне нужно? Разве по этому тоскует душа? Вот что дали мне люди взамен того, по чему тоскует душа! А если б они мне дали того, разве нуждался бы я в этом? (Erofeev, Moskva 26)
>
> But is this what I need? Is this what my soul longs for? This is what I was given instead of that for which my soul longs! Oh if only they gave me that, would I then need this?

Alcohol becomes a substitute for spirituality and humanism, as Venichka discusses the effects of various cocktails on the soul and charts the drinking habits of his employees in order to learn their innermost selves. It is interesting to note

that alcohol is not seen merely as a carnivalesque disorder – it represents both order and its lack. Thus, while Venichka analyses hiccups induced by alcohol as a refutation of dialectical materialism and historical determination, alcohol creates a chaos, a reality that is uncontrollable. But when Venichka charts the drinking of his employees, alcohol creates a kind of order which can be quantitatively analyzed. Alcohol produces a travesty of the sacred or the official in both instances. It shows the futility of imposing order on reality, since there will always be elements outside of that order; but it also shows that systems of order can be premised on anything, even alcoholism, thus revealing their constructed nature. This irreverent negation of all systems is a typical feature of Bakhtin's concept of carnival.

Carnival is defined by Bakhtin as a temporary liberation from the official truth and order and as a revelation of the people's unofficial truth (people's culture, or culture from below, here is different from the popular culture which is still mediated by the official culture, or culture from above). Carnival marks "the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (Rabelais 10). There are several features of carnival that must be stressed and which are relevant to Erofeev's novel, in particular its ambivalence and its officially authorized status. Carnival is a people's feast, which exists alongside the official feasts. The official festivities are created to sanction and reinforce the status quo. Regarding the medieval carnival, Bakhtin writes that the official feast

> looked back at the past and used the past to consecrate the present. Unlike the earlier and purer feast, the official feast asserted all that was stable, unchanging, perennial: the existing hierarchy, the existing religious, political, and moral values, norms, and prohibitions. It was the triumph of a truth already established, the predominant truth that was put forward as eternal and indisputable. (Rabelais 9)

This same description can also be applied to Soviet culture and official celebrations, as it has often been noted that Bakhtin's work can and should be read in the context of Stalinist Russia (see Booker and Juraga). In contrast to the official feast, carnival is all embracing and, while it lasts, "there is no other life outside it" (Bakhtin, Rabelais 7). Carnival creates a suspension of time and, for the duration of the feast, people enter a "utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance" (Bakhtin, Rabelais 9). During carnival everyone is equal as all rank is suspended. This suspension, however, is only temporary and exists only within an officially sanctioned space. Thus carnival functions as a safety valve to release the energy of the people so they can return to the official reality once the feast is over. Drinking in Moskva-Petushki also creates just this kind of temporary suspension of official reality. Through drinking, Venichka enters the world of carnival, where he and his fellow drinkers can be liberated, if only while alcohol lasts. But the subversive role of drinking operates within an officially sanctioned sphere, since it is allowed by the state. The equality of the carnival

does not allow for extraordinary heroes such as the positive hero of the socialist realism. While searching for his morning pick-me-up, Venichka says,

> О, если бы весь мир, если бы каждый в мире был бы, как я сейчас, тих и боязлив, и был бы так же ни в чем не уверен: ни в себе, ни в серьезности своего места под небом -- как хорошо бы! Никаких энтузиастов, никаких подвигов, никакой одержимости! -- всеобщее малодушие. Я согласился бы жить на земле целую вечность, если бы прежде мне показали уголок, где не всегда есть место подвигам. "Всеобщее малодушие" -- да ведь это спасение от всех бед, это панацея, это предикат величайшего совершенства! (Erofeev, Moskva 22)
>
> Oh, if only the whole world and everyone in it were as quiet and frightened as I am right now, and as unsure of everything – of themselves, of the seriousness of their place under the heavens – how much better things would be! There would be no enthusiasts, no heroism, no obsessions -- just general cowardice. I would agree to live on the earth for eternity if first I were shown a corner where there isn't always room for heroism. "Universal cowardice" – that is our salvation from all ills, our panacea, our predicate of ultimate perfection!

Venichka's desire for a quiet, un-heroic world where cowardice is a salvation constitutes a rebellion against a world where heroism and extraordinary feats are celebrated. In a typical carnivalesque inversion and leveling of all ranks, Venichka calls for a universal cowardice which would liberate people to be as they are. Heroism creates a sense of importance of one's "place under the heavens" but alcohol makes one realize his or her insignificance. It is part of the ambivalence of the carnival that Venichka, who speaks of a route to salvation, rather than being portrayed as a hero, is as insignificant and frightened as everyone else. Venichka's lack of heroism is also due to the carnivalesque nature of his narrator. Carnival does not allow heroisms or individuality – it is always communal. Thus, Venichka is joined by his fellow passengers in a symposium and his reminiscences of previous drinking include drinking with others. Most significantly, the drunkard revolution which starts in the chapter "Orehovo-Zuevo – Krutoe" is not merely a carnivalesque parody of the October Revolution but also a sort of realization of 'drunk consciousness' (in contrast to the class consciousness); the alcoholic revolution is a communal carnival. While Venichka is selected president of the new republic, he does not hold any mythical or heroic status but functions more like the jester of the medieval carnival. The importance of the revolution chapters is that they highlight the necessity of community; as a lone individual at the beginning of the novel, Venichka seems pathetic in his search for a glass of wine. But once he partakes in drinking and becomes part of a group, carnival can begin.

A major feature of carnival is the material bodily principle, which is an exaggerated presentation of the human body with food, drink, defecation, and sex. With the exception of drinking, this aspect of carnival is most conspicuously absent in Moskva-Petushki. If carnival is sanctioned by the state, then it can be argued that the material bodily principle functions mainly through alcohol, since that is the sanctioned and most prevalent form of festivity. Drinking creates a carnival because it is de facto permitted by the state through the production and retail of alcoholic drinks. Using this (un)officially sanctioned substance to create a site of resistance is a way to create a travesty. The novel's ambivalence reflects the ambivalent nature of alcohol in Soviet society. Venichka, moreover, is shy about his bodily functions and this highlights a special role of carnival in the novel. Because the state does not allow spirituality and intellectual freedom, carnival creates a possibility of those experiences. The material bodily excess is thus replaced by excesses of language, allowing freedom for all voices to be heard.

The equality of carnival creates a special type of speech which is "frank and free" and removes all distance between people, "liberating [them] from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times" (Bakhtin, Rabelais 10). Carnival develops forms and symbols that oppose all that is static and completed. The idiom of carnival is always dynamic. Its logic is that of a topsy-turvy, upside-down, inside-out world. During carnival there is a continuous shift "from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations,

profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings" (Bakhtin, Rabelais 11). This shifting and travesty are never negative as they are in formal parody. Bakhtin writes that folk humor never denies but revives and renews because "bare negation is completely alien to folk culture" (Rabelais 11). According to him, modern parody is purely negative but medieval parody is ambivalent and renewing. The laughter of carnival is not individual and derisive but universal and ambivalent; it is directed at everyone including the person doing the laughing and it asserts and denies at the same time. This festive ambiguous laughter is reflected in the language of carnival, which is abusive and profane without being humiliating and degrading; it is rather a source of renewal. Modern oaths, on the other hand, only send down but do not revive as "only the bare cynicism and insult have survived" (Bakhtin, Rabelais 28). This could also account for Venichka's shyness as a response to the crudeness of the popular culture in which nothing sacred or delicate remains. Erofeev alludes to that in the "Author's Foreword," saying that most readers, in particular girls, immediately turn to the chapter "Serp i Molot – Karacharovo" because it consists of pure curses.

Alcohol liberates the language of the drunken narrator not only on the level of profanity – unofficial language is one of the forms of the carnivalesque – but also through excess, both linguistic and generic. This is closely tied to the socio-historical context: because of the totalitarian nature of the Soviet regime, language was strictly controlled, especially in the official literature. Alcoholic language is a language which escapes the bounds of control. In the first lines of

Moskva-Petushki, the author's foreword draws attention to the language. Erofeev warns the reader that the chapter "Hammer and Sickle – Karacharovo" had previously consisted of "pure *mat*" (Russian for obscene language). Because all readers would inevitably begin with that chapter, he removed the obscenities so that people would read the entire novel and not be offended. This foreword is as fictional as the rest of the novel but, by creating a fictionalized paratext, it emphasizes the language of the novel that follows. Moreover, despite the claim that the offensive language was removed, the unofficial people's language is present and is allowed to exist alongside the official rhetoric as the novel is also permeated with official slogans. The slogans are often inverted and are given unofficial meanings but they exist on the same level as the other language of the novel. The alcoholic narrator combines sublime and offensive language and imagery in a carnivalesque fashion. This mix of disparate elements downgrades the high culture and Soviet official culture/ideology, not in a negative satiric attack, but with a carnivalesque ambivalence. Venichka does not attack the Soviet rule as such:

> Веничка (как и Ерофеев-писатель) мог бы повторить слова героя Зощенко: 'Он не советской властью недоволен, он мирозданием недоволен' (Suhih n. pag.)
>
> Venichka (just like Erofeev-the-author) could have repeated the words of Zoschenko's hero: 'He is unhappy not with the Soviet rule, he is unhappy with the universe'

This is closely tied to the carnivalesque nature of the novel; since carnival is ambivalent and positive, rather than derisive and negative, the novel does not create pure parody but treats everything with equal (ir)reverence.

The excess of the language is also carried out on a generic level. As opposed to the monolithic genre of the socialist realism, Moskva-Petushki switches genres with ease so that even the narrator himself asks,

> Черт знает, в каком жанре я доеду до Петушков... От самой Москвы все были философские эссе и мемуары, все были стихотворения в прозе, как у Ивана Тургенева... Теперь начинается детективная повесть... (59)
>
> Who knows in what genre I will arrive in Petushki… Since we left Moscow there were philosophical essays and memoirs, there were poems in prose, like in Ivan Turgenev…. Now begins a detective novel…

Suhih lists some of the genres that appear in Moskva-Petushki: alcoholic memoir, industrial novel, detective novel, travelogue, ironical mystery play, surrealism, grotesque, philosophical essay, poetry, cookbook, erotic novel, dialogue-symposium. The novel plays a game with genres by not allowing any of them to predominate. The ambivalence of carnival means that many genres and voices are permitted, all of them with equal importance.

Bakhtin writes that the novel as a literary form is characterized by a "diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a

diversity of individual voices, artistically organized" (Dialogic 262). Dialogism is the characteristic of a heteroglossic, or many-voiced, world. It means that there is constant interaction among meanings. This is linked directly to Venichka's drinking and his liberated language. Karen Ryan-Hayes states that the fragmentation of language in Moskva-Petushki "reflects the chaos and fragmentation of the world around Venichka; the rapid pace of the text and the disjuncture between episodes enhance this effect" (77). But it does not only reflect fragmentation, it also subverts the official order which presents reality as monolithic. The narrative, liberated by drink, and overflowing with linguistic and generic excess, creates a dialogic interaction among the elements which range from Biblical allegory to people's culture, from classical literature to socialist realism, and from Western literature to Russian. Because it is highly dialogic, the novel resists monologic interpretation; it contains many meanings, some of which exclude the others, but they all must be accepted as equally valid. Any attempt to fix the meaning monologically does violence to the carnivalesque heteroglossia contained within the text. Regarding attempts at interpretation, especially of the final fantastic chapters, Suhih writes:

> Ответ на вопрос, почему в подмосковной электричке появляются Сатана, Сфинкс, эриннии вместе с материализовавшимся из новеллы женщины с трудной судьбой трактористом Евтюшкиным, может быть только один: а потому! (Suhih n. pag.)

> The answer to the question of why Satan, the Sphinx, and the Furies together with Evtiushkin, who materialized from the novella of the woman with difficult fate, appear in a Moscow train can only be: "because!"

Dialogism challenges the propositions that reality is stable and knowable and that it is monolithic and categorical. Consequently, any monolithic interpretation of Moskva-Petushki is equally challenged by the text. One of the first and still most important monographs on the novel, Svetlana Gaiser-Shnitman's Venedikt Erofeev. Moskva-Petushki ili "The Rest is Silence", traces many sources of Venichka's quotations and allusions and interprets the text in Christian terms. However, such an effort, while a valid attempt at interpretation, is only one among many possible readings. The shortcoming of these critical works is that they do not explicitly (or even implicitly) recognize the dialogic nature of the novel and, therefore, attempt to explicate one consistent meaning. But these critical interpretations inevitably fall short because they cannot consistently account for all the elements of the novel. Overall, too much critical attention has been paid to the Christian/Christ allegory elements present in the novel. Furthermore, many articles are nothing more than efforts at encyclopedic cataloguing of references and allusions in the text. The most thorough annotation of the novel by Eduard Vlasov is four times the length of Erofeev's text. But there are also articles that pass for criticism and do nothing more than attempt to trace and reveal the sources of the references in the novel. While they are impressive in

their scope, they miss the mark. Suhih points out the problem with such analyses when he states:

> ...интертекстуальный слой, пусть необычайно плотный, является для автора не целью, а средством. Если все может быть цитатой, а может ею и не быть, то раскрытие какого угодно количества цитат и, вообще, культурных и биографических подтекстов не решает проблемы интерпретации мира поэмы как целого. (n. pag.)
>
> The intertextual layer, even if unusually thick, is not the end but the means for the author. If everything can be, or not be, a quotation, then the unearthing of any number of quotations or cultural and biographical subtexts in general, does not solve the problem of interpretation of the *poema*'s world as a whole.

The problem of interpretation is not solved because the source of the references is not crucial to understanding the text. The references are not quotations; they are part of cultural currency which is given voice by the text. The phrases and references circulate in the culture, and in particular milieux. The novel does not give preference to any particular social experience and allows all of them to interact equally. Recognizing the dialogic interaction of many voices in the novel is much more important than tracing all of their sources. What is important is that there are many (incompatible) voices interacting in the text. Furthermore, the tracing of sources usually results in attempts to create some sort of a consistent

interpretation of the novel. So, the tracing of Biblical quotations by Paperno and Gasparov once again results in a Christian-allegorical reading of the text. This most prevalent reading of the novel runs into many problems of consistency, as Suhih writes,

> Если в нескольких случаях герой сравнивает себя с Иисусом, пречем иронически, стоит ли генерализовать эту аналогию? (Ведь сына у Спасителя не было, а ерофеевский герой собственного сына не исцеляет: различий в упомянутой сцене больше, чем внешнего сходства.) (n. pag.)
>
> If, on several occasions, the hero compares himself to Jesus, and ironically at that, does it warrant generalization of the analogy? (After all, the Saviour had no son and Erofeev's hero does not cure his own child: there are more differences in the aforementioned scene than surface similarities).

But even that rebuttal is not crucial. There are Biblical allusions in the text and they do provide a context for a possible allegorical reading. The fact that the allegorical interpretation is inconsistent does not refute it simply because that meaning of the text is in a dynamic interaction with other meanings.

There are also several critical attempts to come to terms with the genre of Moskva-Petushki. It is often described as either a grotesque or a picaresque novel. While both of those assertions are valid, the most interesting and fruitful approach to the question of genre is found in Petr Vail' and Alexander Genis's article

"Strasti po Erofeevu." It is not so much a work of criticism as a work of admiration and appreciation. Vail' and Genis approach the text on its own terms, writing in a language similar to that of the novel. In order to describe the language of the alcoholic narrator, they coin a term *poliv*, which they describe as the "ecstasy of the tongue" (екстаз языка). Regarding interpretations of *poliv*, they write, "Хороши бы мы были, если бы искали смысла и расшифровки того, что смысла и расшифровки не имеет. То есть полива" (53) (We would be a sight for sore eyes if we looked for sense and decoding in that which has none. That is, of *poliv*.) *Poliv* is derived from a Russian word for 'pouring' and is linked directly to the overflow of language in the novel as it correctly pinpoints linguistic excess. Nevertheless, other descriptions of the text's genre as a grotesque are also useful. Moskva-Petushki, in contrast to socialist realism, can be characterized as a specimen of grotesque realism, which is defined by Bakhtin as having the essential principle of degradation or "the lowering of all that high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity" (Rabelais 19-20). Like carnival, the grotesque image is marked by ambivalence. The carnival-grotesque form allows the combination of a variety of different elements and liberates the text from the official point of view, "from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted" (Bakhtin, Rabelais 34). It allows a chance to view the world anew and to realize the relativity of everything that is. In the novel, reality can be seen through the fantastic narrative of the drunken narrator, who is

bordering on madness. Madness is inherent in the grotesque form but it is a festive madness, a joyous parody of official reason and truth. In later literature madness becomes tragic, individual, and isolated. It becomes a source of fear, which is absent in the folk grotesque where fear is defeated by laughter. Venichka's drinking is not tragic; he is both degraded and uplifted through his alcoholism as it debases his body but uplifts his soul. Degradation is a means of coming down to earth, it is not humiliating but a form of renewal. Bakhtin writes that "to degrade is to bury, to sow, and to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better" (Rabelais 21). And, as many critics have noted, Venichka is both killed and renewed by drinking in scenes that can be interpreted as allusions to the crucifixion and resurrection.

A major part of the novel is Venichka's train trip to Petushki. The travel in Moskva-Petushki is directly linked to Venichka's drinking. He takes his first drink of the day after boarding the train and gets progressively more intoxicated as the train approaches his utopia. The trip is marked only by chapter headings, with the narrative taking place between the stops. Unlike in a travelogue, we get no descriptions of the outside world, the train being a contained universe speeding between stops. This reflects the nature of carnival as a self-contained space outside of the official sphere, but it also alludes to the socialist-realist chronotope where the setting of a novel would be a microcosm for the larger reality. This allusion inverts the Stalinist chronotope by creating a microcosm of travesty.

The train, by which Venichka attempts to go to Petushki, is a cultural symbol in Russia. Viacheslav Kuritsyn describes Russia's relation to train travel in the following way:

> Железная дорога в России -- не средство передвижения. Ее не используют для перемещения в пространстве, ее переживают как один из мистических символов страны ... Мистичность России неотделима от необъятности пространств; железнодорожная сеть, сумевшая объять необъятное, покрыть собою страну, соразмерна, следовательно, сомистична. (Kuritsyn 296-97)
>
> The railroad in Russia is not a method of transportation. It is not used for movement in space; it is lived as one of the mystical symbols of the nation ... The mysticism of Russia is inseparable from the boundlessness of spaces; the railroad, able to bind the boundless, to cover the country, is commeasurable and, therefore, co-mystical.

The train has been a symbol in pre-revolutionary Russia as well as in the post-revolutionary Soviet Union when the *bronepoezd* (armored train) was a symbol of the new government. Thus, the train functions as both a symbol of a nation and a symbol of the Soviet rule. In this way, the travel is linked directly to the novel's chronotope. Travel by train, like the socialist realist chronotope, is linear and teleological. The train follows the tracks in a predetermined linear progression

and it is teleological because it has a clear destination. The tracks that the train follows reflect the communist conception of history as being predetermined. On a literal level, travel by train is restricted by tracks and schedules (created by the government) and therefore it operates and is confined within the official sphere. The teleological nature of Venichka's travel is further highlighted by his destination being a place of utopia, just as is the destination of Soviet history. The escape from Moscow to the rural Petushki is subversive of socialist realism but it also follows later tropes of that genre. In the Stalinist novel, Moscow typically represents the place that has "a direct link, via the leadership, with the Great Times of the past and the future" (K. Clark, "Political" 233). Post-Stalin fiction, however, reverses this chronotope. The central character is disillusioned with the corruption and bureaucracy and seeks the ideal in a remote locale (K. Clark, "Political" 240). Thus, while rejection of Moscow is clearly subversive, it still interacts with and references the official ideology.

If the chronotope of the novel is critical to understanding its genre, the chronotope of Moskva-Petushki must be analyzed in relation to the Stalinist chronotope because Venichka's narrative is a form of rebellion against the official narratives. The chronotope of socialist realism, as discussed earlier, is dual: it looks back to reaffirm the status quo and looks forward to utopia. The Stalinist chronotope is also essentially teleological. The chronotope of Moskva-Petushki bears a striking similarity to the socialist realist novel: it too is forward looking as Venichka travels linearly towards the utopia of Petushki. It also looks back to the

mythical time of his previous visits to Petushki and especially his first encounter with his lover. Travel in Moskva-Petushki, just like Venichka's drinking, operates within the official ideology and its tropes and, at the same time, subverts them.

In order to elucidate the chronotope of the novel, I will look closely at its ending. The final chapters of Moskva-Petushki highlight the carnivalesque and dialogic nature of the novel. The ending is problematic for monologic interpretations and there is no critical consensus on all of its elements. The chapter "Usad – 105th Kilometer" marks a turning point in the narrative. Venichka enters a dark fantastic world which could be a paranoid hallucination induced by his drinking. Inexplicably, he ends up back in Moscow and finally finds the Kremlin only to be confronted by four thugs. They chase him back to the same front hall in which he began his narrative that morning and finally murder him:

> И вот тут случилось самое ужасное: один из них, с самым свирепым и классическим профилем, вытащил из кармана громадное шило с деревянноы рукояткой; может быть, даже не шило, а отвертку или что-то еще -- я не знаю. Но он приказал всем остальным держать мои руки, и, как я ни защищался, они пригвоздили меня к полу, совершенно ополоумевшего...
>
> --Зачем-зачем?...зачем-зачем-зачем?...-- бормотал я...
>
> Они вонзили мне свое шило в самое горло...

Я не знал, что есть на свете такая боль, я скрючился от муки. Густая красная буква "Ю" распласталась у меня в глазах, задрожала, и с тех пор я не приходил в сознание, и никогда не приду. (Erofeev, Moskva 119)

And then the most terrible things happened: one of them, with the fiercest and the most classical profile, pulled a huge awl with a wooden handle out of his pocket, maybe not even an awl but a screwdriver, or something else, I don't know. But he ordered the others to hold my arms and no matter how I defended myself, they pinned me half-crazed down to the floor…

"Why-why?... why-why-why?..." I murmured.

They stuck the awl into my throat.

I never knew that there is pain like that in the world and I writhed in torment. A thick letter "Yu" spread across my eyes and started to quiver and since then I have not regained consciousness, and I never will.

There had been much discussion in the critical literature on the significance of this ending. Most critics agree that the foursome represents either the four Horsemen of the Apocalypse or the communist quartet of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin. There are also discussions on the meaning of the final vision of the letter "Yu" and of the complete loss of consciousness by the narrator. In addition, some critics focus on the Christian allegorical significance of the ending,

specifically on the metaphor of crucifixion. Others reject metaphorical readings and interpret the ending literally as a hallucination induced by delirium tremens. These critics see Venichka's unexplained arrival in the same building entry where his journey started as a consequence of his switching of trains midway to Petushki, an event he neglects to notice in his drunkenness. These are just a few examples of the interpretations offered. The critical discussions and the lack of critical consensus highlight the dialogical nature of the ending and of the novel in general. Finding one consistent interpretation is nearly impossible because the novel contains so many contradictory voices. The ending can be interpreted on a literal as well as on a symbolic or fantastic level. But these approaches are not mutually exclusive; they can all be valid. Thus, on a literal level, Venichka suffers delirium tremens induced by excessive drinking and the ending is either a literal murder or a hallucination before death from an alcoholic overdose. On this level, the self-destruction by alcohol is a rebellion against the restrictive state and the image of a healthy and productive Soviet citizen.

More fruitful are the metaphoric and symbolic readings. This does not mean, however, that the literal level cannot co-exist with the symbolic. On the symbolic level, continuing the carnivalesque reading of the novel, the death is the end of carnival. Bakhtin stressed the officially sanctioned nature of carnival and, as I discussed, alcohol bears that characteristic as well. Thus any carnivalesque subversion involving alcohol must be brought to an end. Nevertheless, carnival cannot be contained even if it is forced to come to an end. This is signaled by the

letter "Yu" which is symbolic of the narrator's son (next generation) and by the narration itself, which must take place after the loss of consciousness. Suhih is right in pointing out that the meaning of the letter is not as important as understanding the changing size of the letter. Because the letter is linked to Venichka's son, its invocation in the final moments of Venichka's life foreshadows the next generation's quest for the same things that Venichka had looked for. The fact that Venichka loses all consciousness and yet manages to narrate the novel (which is told in the past tense), shows a carnivalesque disregard for logic. Death, while final, is also a source of renewal and, thus, Venichka's narrative exists circularly. His categorical denial that he will ever regain consciousness is not a denial of his narrative but rather a denial of utopia.

The ending can also be approached through the notion of chronotope. If the novel interacts with the socialist realist chronotope and is, prior to the ending, similarly linear and teleological, then the ending subverts both linearity and teleology. Utopia cannot be reached and never will be reached because of Venichka's murder. He does not gain *higher* consciousness the way socialist realist heroes do but, in a complete reversal, categorically loses *all* consciousness. The quest for utopia ultimately results in terror, destruction, and death. These elements are different from the carnival described by Bakhtin because they are dark and fearful. Venichka dies "Потому что нет никакого ада, нет никакого рая, есть только то, что есть, и нет ничего страшнее этого, и нет спасения" (Vail' 62) ("Because there is no hell and there is no heaven; there is only that

which is and there is nothing scarier than that and no salvation"). When carnival is finished, the return to the official reality results in death because the official reality is a negation of all reality as it denies both heaven and hell.

All of the above interpretations of the ending and any additional ones are equally valid. What matters for any interpretation are not external links but internal cohesion. This cohesion, however, cannot be achieved with a monologic and definitive interpretation of a work such as Moskva-Petushki. What is important is realizing the dialogic and carnivalesque nature of the text which is mitigated through Venichka's drinking. It is alcohol, with its problematic place in the Soviet society, which allows both subversion and liberation. Because it is de facto condoned by the official rule, it can be utilized as a tool of resistance used to create and reveal meanings which are repressed by the totalitarian ruling ideology.

Erofeev's play Val'purgieva Noch', ili Shagi Comandora (Walpurgis Night, or the Commendatore's Steps) has not enjoyed the same popularity as his novel. It has been translated into English by Alexander Burry and Tatiana Tulchinsky as Walpurgis Night, or "The Steps of the Commander" but, as the translators themselves note in the introduction, it is very difficult to render into another language and culture. Much like Moskva-Petushki, the text is full of literary and cultural references and linguistic games. It also contains many types of language such as official Soviet slogans or medical discourse of the doctors which are contrasted to the types of language used by the patients. These differences are difficult if not impossible to capture, especially because the

immediate recognition of official or popular types of discourse is lost for the reader in a different culture and in another language. Beyond these difficulties of translation, there is also the shadow of Erofeev's novel which overpowers everything else he wrote. He is known mainly as the author of Moskva-Petushki but Val'purgieva Noch' continues the themes and strategies of the novel. It can be useful therefore to look at the two together.

Erofeev claimed that the play was supposed to be the second work in a triptych. The first, "The Night of Ivan Kupalo," was to take place in a bottle return depot and the third, "The Night Before Christmas," was to be set in an orthodox cathedral. It is not certain whether or not the claim was yet another fiction propagated by Erofeev. The plot of Val'purgieva Noch' once again revolves around an alcoholic, Lev Isaakovich Gurevich. It takes place in a psychiatric ward to which Gurevich is admitted due to his drinking on the eve of the first of May. The world of the hospital is clearly separated into the official and tyrannical order of doctors, nurses, and orderlies and the world of the patients, which has its own hierarchy. After being admitted to the hospital in Act 1, Gurevich is assigned to Ward 3. There, his ward-mates include Prohorov, a monitor of Ward 3 and a dictator of Ward 2, Prohorov's arms bearer Aleha the Dissident. During the course of the play, the two conduct a trial of the rear admiral Mihalych, an obvious travesty of the official trials. Among other inhabitants of Ward 3 are Vova, a melancholy old man from a village; Serezha Kleinmikhel, a meek schemer; Stasik, an orator and a gardener; Khokhulia, a

sexual mystic and a Satanist. These characters create their own world inside the Ward, a world which blends many types of languages and references in much the same way as Venichka's heteroglossic narrative. The orderlies, especially Boria and Tamarochka, brutalize the patients, so Gurevich comes up with a plan. In Act 3, he romances the nurse Natali, whom he knows from his previous stays at the hospital, and steals her keys. Act 4 is a prelude to the Walpurgis Night, which is ushered in with the alcohol Gurevich stole from cabinets. In Act 5, the patients celebrate Walpurgis Night by drinking, while the medical personnel celebrate the International Workers' Day, an official holiday in the Soviet Union. The patients drink and die, one by one, until the doctors find only the barely-breathing and blinded Gurevich. The curtain goes down in darkness as the orderly Boria is brutally beating Gurevich.

I wish to briefly note the features of the play which complement the themes of Moskva-Petushki and in particular its use of language. I will also address the ending of the play, which, similarly to the novel, problematizes any attempts at interpretation. First of all, regarding the genre of the text, Val'purgieva Noch', while clearly a play, subverts the conventions of the form. Many stage directions are quite impossible to execute on the stage. One stage direction, for example, reads, "at his every exclamation Sibelius retreats for a time and a music intrudes which, if to translate it into an olfactory language, gives off a smell of rotten pork, a dog and burnt fur." While such play with the genre is not new, it is clearly subversive of the official socialist realist forms. The language of

the patients is similarly subversive in that it includes many kinds of discourse and is subversive in its refusal to adhere to the official logic. This language comes into a clear clash with the official language. During Gurevich's admittance interview, for example, he tells the doctor that he measures distance in Bosphoruses. This could seem as a symptom of madness but, as doctor himself states later, psychiatric disorders are a matter of perspective. This passage informs the whole of the play and I quote it in full:

> Доктор: Сказать вам по секрету, мы с недавнего времени приступили к госпитализации даже тех, у кого -- на поверхностный взгляд -- нет в наличии ни единого психического расстроиства. Но ведь мы не должны забывать о способностях этих больных к непроизвольной или хорошо обдуманой диссимуляции. Эти люди, как правило, до конца своей жизни не совершают ни одного антисоциального поступка, ни одного преступного деяния, ни даже малейшего намека на нервную неуравновешенность. Но вот именно этим-то они и опасны и должны подлежать лечению. Хотя бы по причине их внутренней несклонности к социальной адаптации... (277-78)
>
> DOCTOR: To tell you in secret, recently we began to hospitalize even those who, by an external glance, do not exhibit any symptoms of a psychiatric disorder. But we should not forget the

> capacity of these patients for involuntary and well thought out dissimulation. These people, as a rule, until the end of their life, never commit any anti-social action, any criminal deed, and never exhibit even the slightest hint at a nervous unbalance. But they are dangerous precisely because of that and they must undergo treatment. Even if only because of their inner disinclination towards social adaptation…

This passage highlights the social constructedness of both alcoholism and mental illness. The doctor hospitalizes people because they cannot fit into the dominant social order – they are pathologized as alcoholics and insane. It is the recognition of this process of marginalization and exclusion that an examination of Erofeev's alcoholic narratives provides. The alcoholic and the madman are symbolically expelled out of the society not because they are ill but because they open a possibility of another meaning, a meaning which conflicts with the hegemonic one.

The play, however, is not purely negative in its satire and commentary on social practices. Similarly to Moskva-Petushki, the patients' conversations exhibit a multitude of languages, giving all of them equal status. In one of the more striking examples, Mikhalych is prompted to pray before his trial and impeding execution. His prayer takes on the form of official phrases and slogans which glorify the Soviet nation:

> Михалыч. За Москву-мать не страшно умирать, Москва -- всем столицам голова, в Кремле побывать -- ума набрать, от ленинской науки крепнут разум и руки, СССР -- всему миру пример, Москва -- Родины украшение, врагам устрашение... (Erofeev, Val'purgieva 284)
>
> MIKHALYCH: I'd gladly lose an arm and hand, for Moscow, dearest Motherland; Moscow is the world's true center, the greatest city you could enter; Go to the Kremlin for just a while, it'll fashion your mind in the proper style; Take Lenin's lessons, heed them well, your mind and hands will be stronger than hell; The Soviet Union's the very best, a shining example for the West; For us Moscow's a beautiful sight, but for her foes, an awful fright... (Burry and Tulchinsky n.pag.)

The presence of the official language is not derisive but festive. The patients' language tolerates many types of discourses, which is in direct contrast with the official intolerance towards alternative or oppositional meanings. Thus, the doctor attempts to prevent Gurevich from speaking in iambic pentameter, while the patients speak in many types of poetic forms.

Gurevich's plan for the Walpurgis Night coincides directly with the official celebrations of the International Workers' Day. Thus, carnival is created within the official celebrations. Gurevich contrasts the two types of festivities:

Гуревич. Однако!.. Там (кивает в ту сторону, где проишодит маевка медперсонала), там веселятся совсем иначе. Ну, что же... Мы -- подкидыши, и пока еще не найденыши. Но их окружают сплетни, а нас легенды. Мы -- игровые, они -- документальные. Они -- дельные, а мы -- беспредельные. Они -- бывалый народ. Мы -- народ небывалый. Они -- лающие, мы -- пылающие. У них -- позывы...

Прохоров. А у нас -- порывы, само собой... Верно говоришь! У них -- жисть-жистянка, а у нас -- житие! (Erofeev, Valpurgis 331)

GUREVICH: Well, well …There *(nods towards the May-Day celebrations of the medical personnel.)*, there they celebrate in a completely different way. Well, what can you do… We are foundlings, not yet found. But they are surrounded by gossip, and we by legends. We are playful, they – documentary. They are functional, and we are limitless. They are worldly. And we are otherworldly. They bark while we burn. They have desires…

PROHOROV: And we have impulses, of course… You speak the truth! They have biography, but we have hagiography!

The subversive festivities of the patients, mediated by their drinking, soon result in their deaths. The Walpurgis Night, as Gurevich explains, has always been marked by something terrifying and demonic, the participation of Satan. The Walpurgis Night celebrations are called by Gurevich "witches' Sabbath" (Erofeev, Val'purgieva 307). There are also undertones of the Don Juan story, signaled in the title through "The Steps of the Commandore." Gurevich is cast in the role of the Stone Guest (the Commandore of the Don Juan story) as he promises Boria to visit him for breakfast. At the end, however, Gurevich does not take Boria to hell; instead, the orderly beats up the barely alive Gurevich. How then can we understand the ending of the play, with all the inmates dead from drinking and the curtain going down on Gurevich's screams of near-death pain. Regarding Gurevich's role in the play, in their introduction to the translation, Burry and Tulchinsky note that, while he is a dissident poet, he himself censors the speech of the patients. As they write,

> by blurring the boundary between rebellion and conformity in this manner, Erofeev ultimately expresses doubt about the capacity of dissident poets to counter the reigning Soviet ideology effectively, due to their own complicity. Thus the play is a pessimistic rather than celebratory account of the poet and his role in society. As such, it is a universal rather than purely Russian tragedy, despite its obvious literary and political references to the Soviet Union of the early 1980s. (n. pag.)

This interpretation, however, fails to note that Gurevich is the one who plans and executes the Walpurgis Night festivities. Furthermore, his censoring of the patients' language stems directly from his discussion of the coarseness of the Russian people who have lost all touch with spirituality and aesthetism – a clear criticism of the Soviet ideology. At the end of the play, before the medical personnel enter, Gurevich explains to Prohorov that his only intention was to "bring dawn into the eve of these souls, locked up here until the end of their days" (Erofeev, Val'purgieva 341). He also states that it is too late to discuss intentions; he and Prohorov have passed the lethal dose of alcohol long ago, the only thing left is to continue. Gurevich does not give up, even after finishing off the alcohol and facing certain death. He insists on keeping his appointment with Boria. Gurevich's actions do not signal complicity but rather rebellion – he recognizes that rebellion leads to death (which is also the only means of escape) but that should not stop dissent; the only thing left is to continue. Only by shedding his fear of death, by facing brutal demise, but continuing nevertheless, can Gurevich rebel and escape.

Val'purgieva Noch' continues the subversive themes of Moskva-Petushki, albeit in a different guise. In the play the official dictatorial order is explicitly present but the escape strategies are similar to those of Venichka – through alcohol. Alcohol does not lead to escapism but to subversion and rebellion, a challenge to the official order. Alcohol liberates both the inmates of Ward 3 and

Venichka because its subversive effects, on language in particular, cannot be incorporated into the dominant world order.

Chapter 2: Jack Kerouac

The history of alcohol in the United States, just as in the Soviet Union, reflects the conflicts within the society's ideology. Despite the fact that there is no explicit official ideology in the United States, the founding myths of individuality and self-determination play a major part in how alcohol and its consumption have been conceptualized through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Contrary to the case with the Soviet Union, the lack of clearly defined ideology to oppose and the ability of the social system to absorb dissenting voices in the United States impede the role of drinking as a tool of resistance. In this chapter I will look at Jack Kerouac, a writer who is seen as a representative of the Beat Generation. Drinking is a constant presence in his novels, as well as in his biography. But despite Kerouac's countercultural image, his drinking does not become a site of subversion. This is in part due to Kerouac's dedication to the spontaneous experience and the fusion of life and art. Kerouac's subversiveness is based on the traditional American values of radical individual freedom and, as such, could not become a basis for social protest. More importantly, however, the fusion of art and life as conceived by Kerouac brought his writing to the level of an individual, counteracting the role of his works as the voice of a generation; this element of Kerouac's writings was exploited by the media, which recast him as an individual, thus counteracting his status as a symbol. Before elaborating on this, I will first begin with a brief history of drinking and alcoholism in the United States. I will

then proceed to discuss the function of drinking in Kerouac's writings and his problematic role as a countercultural icon.

Prior to the nineteenth century, the consumption of alcohol in the United States was not seen as problematic either for the individual or for the society. It was assumed that people were drinking because they wanted to rather than because they were addicted and alcohol "served in fact to maintain and promote social cohesion" (Crowley, The White Logic 1). Concern with alcoholism rose only during the nineteenth century, following the recent development of the concept of addiction. A new view of drinking as addictive behavior was developed by persons "who tended to see deviance in general, and drunkenness in particular, as problematic and unnatural" (Levine 151). The proponents of the addiction model were mostly members of the middle class who saw sobriety as a precondition of a prosperous individualistic economic order. For them, "the consumption of alcohol undermined worker discipline and productivity, and it was antithetical to the controlled, disciplined character of middle class ideals" (Crowley, The White Logic 3).

Dr. Benjamin Rush, considered to be the founder of the nineteenth century Temperance Movement, is credited with the development of the modern conception of alcohol addiction. With the influence of his writings, the experience of drinking became recast in terms of weak will and a socially legitimate vocabulary of addiction was developed. According to Rush's theories, people became addicted to alcohol because they lacked proper self-control. The same

patterns of drinking as before continued but now the perception of them was recast. As Harry Levine writes,

> what was new in the 19th century was the legitimacy of a particular way of interpreting the experience and behavior of drunkards. In colonial society there may have been isolated individuals who felt 'overwhelmed' by their desires for drink, but there was no socially legitimate vocabulary for organizing the experience and for talking about it; it remained an inchoate and extremely private experience. (154, footnote)

The Temperance Movement located the site of addiction in the substance itself, that is, in alcohol. It viewed the drunkard with sympathy because she or he fell prey to an addictive substance and was medically ill. But the medicalization of alcoholism soon ran into problems. The idea that alcohol is inherently addictive implied that the only way to avoid the disease was through total abstinence. The consumption of alcohol, however, does not necessarily lead to addiction as alcohol is part of social and cultural traditions. Also, with the development of a social order that depended on self-control (Levine 163), and with an ideology that was based on individual responsibility and self-determination, the locus of social control had to shift to the individual -- alcoholics had to control themselves. The idea that a person could lose control could not co-exist with the capitalist ideology which required "that individuals methodically regulate their activities in order to survive and succeed" (Levine 164). While in the Soviet Union an official stance

on alcoholism is possible due to the totalitarian ideology, in the United States anti-alcohol movements came in conflict with the founding myths of the American identity: "the American Revolution was fought to secure individual liberty and the Declaration of Independence was composed to assure freedom of choice" (Rosenthal and Reynolds 5). By the end of the nineteenth century, the paradigm of alcoholism began to shift. There were, of course, continuous concerns over drinking, but by the time of the Prohibition in the early twentieth century, the focus was on the social effects of alcohol rather than on its addictive properties. This shift drew attention away from the possibility that an individual is not in complete control of his or her own destiny.

The disease conception of alcohol was "rediscovered" in the 1930s and 1940s. But now the addiction was located in the person rather than in the substance. This re-conceptualization of the medical model was based on the ideology of self-discipline; alcoholics were now required to regain self-control and were not pitied like the drinkers of the nineteenth century who succumbed to a disease. This change in the medical paradigm is developed to resolve a contradiction within the American ideology created by alcohol. Capitalist ideology is ultimately an ideology of an individual with the freedom of self-determination. Society and social institutions are not part of that ideology except in so far as they are formed by individuals for their own self-interests (self-interests that are not defined). The dominant capitalist ideology works through the strategy of fragmentation and unification (Hall, "Culture" 336-37). During the

fragmentation stage, social groups with their particular interests are broken down into individuals. In the process of unification, individuals are then bound into an "imaginary coherence of the state, the nation and the 'national interest'" (Hall, "Culture" 337). Fragmentation results in the ideology of radical individualism, preventing individuals from recognizing their allegiance to social classes or groups. But because of this ideology, society cannot explicitly censor individual actions such as drinking.

What the capitalist ideology seeks to do is to create a society of self-regulating individuals who will see their self-interests primarily defined through economic profit. The ideology naturalizes the idea that to achieve the maximization of profit, an individual must be industrious, a quality which is hampered by habitual drinking. Drinking must be perceived by individuals as undesirable and, therefore, individuals must regulate their own drinking habits. Alcohol thus brings out a contradiction – an individual must be absolutely free to choose and yet some choices are pre-determined by the ideology.

Drinking in America is an ambiguous activity. On the one hand, it is problematic and deviant because it does not foster productivity and maximization of profit. On the other hand, it cannot be regulated because it is both part of social traditions but also, more importantly, because regulation of an individual activity goes squarely against the capitalist ideology. Regulating alcohol as an addictive substance would imply that an individual is not always in control of his or her own destiny. The disease model of alcoholism seeks, in part, to hide the

contradiction by relocating it from the level of the ideology to the level of the individual – there is no contradiction in the ideology there are just people who have weak self-control and become addicts. This is similar to the Soviet strategy of relegating the responsibility for alcoholism to the individual level in order to disguise the contradiction in the official ideology. In America, cure for alcoholism is the reclamation of self-control -- Alcoholics Anonymous is based upon this model. If an individual chooses not to reclaim it, however, alcohol can become a site of resistance against capitalist values. An alcoholic gives up control to the substance and also gives up the productive pursuit of profit. But this revolt is as contradictory as the ideology against which it goes. This very idea of resistance presupposes the same individual freedom of self-determination upon which the capitalist ideology rests. In order for the oppositional meaning of drinking to emerge, it must bypass both the binding and the fragmentation stage and recover the communal and social meaning. Individual subversive actions remain at the fragmentation stage, and cannot be truly threatening to the hegemonic meanings.

Alcohol and dissent in literature in the United States go back to Prohibition and the Lost Generation. Drinking was prevalent among the writers of the Lost Generation and it became a symbol of revolt. It was also part of their adoption of French traditions. Some members of the Lost Generation migrated to Paris and adopted the French idea of drinking as being closely linked to radicalism and the avant-garde. The modernist drunk narrative represented "excessive drinking as an inevitable response of the sensitive consciousness to the

nightmarish human condition" (Crowley, "Alcoholism" 174). The Lost Generation felt disillusioned with the world and "drinking in defiance of Prohibition was a sign of solidarity with the rising generation's resistance to what it called 'Puritanism' and to what it deemed to be the oppression of bourgeois American life" (Crowley, "Alcoholism" 166). But in this resistance through drinking the Lost Generation went back to American values. In the words of the American journalist A. J. Liebling, this generation "proved to [them]selves [their] freedom as individuals" (qtd. in Crowley, "Alcoholism" 166), which is precisely the same individualistic freedom upon which the capitalist ideology is premised. Soon, however, the medical paradigm which was solidified in the mid-twentieth century, changed how drunkenness was written about. The demystification of the White Logic, a phrase used by Jack London to refer to the disillusionment and helplessness brought on by alcohol, and seen as a tool of inspiration for the artist, created "a new mode of American fiction in which habitual drunkenness was figured less as a sign of The Modern Temper than as the symptom of a disease" (Crowley, "Alcoholism" 175). At this time of a shifting medical paradigm, a new group of underground writers known as the Beat Generation emerged as the new voice of the counterculture.

The Beats, similarly to the Lost Generation, were rebelling against what they saw as the powerlessness of the individual in a soulless society. At a debate titled "Is there a Beat Generation" in 1958, the British-American anthropologist Ashley Montagu said that the Beat Generation is "the ultimate expression of a

civilization whose moral values have broken down" (qtd. in Charters 299). Against the middle-class complacency of the postwar mass society, the Beats celebrated creativity, spontaneity, freedom, and a radical search for self. The Beat Generation opposed mass society and materialism, rejecting social codes and instead advocating sexual and spiritual liberation premised on individualism. The postwar underground fiction was different from the political fiction about marginality that came before:

> many American writers of the postwar period were celebrating the freedom of marginality, particularly in light of growing materialism, affluence, and technological progress. In their novels drug use, obsessive wandering, open sexuality, and even violence, all adversarial responses to mainstream social and political life constituted a rejection of standard modes of behavior ... Insisting on radical notions of freedom, these postwar writers served as counteragents in conflict with a larger, blander culture. (Newhouse 10)

The Beats did not seek a political revolution, although they insisted on community created possibilities of collective resistance; rather, they focused on the authenticity of the individual experience. Because the Beat Generation focused on non-conformity and spontaneity, drugs and alcohol were essential to its lifestyle. For the Beats, substance abuse had a symbolic quality and it was necessary for personal style as it "expanded consciousness, illuminated despair

and ecstasy; [it was] used to bring about a 'tingling high of significance to quicken the previous inner presence'" (Burgess 228). The Beats used drugs and alcohol to induce "madness," which they defined as a state an artist "must create at the axis between sanity and madness" (Burgess 229). This madness is both dangerous and innocent, a way to point out the insanity of the soulless complacent society: "recognizing that madness was a kind of retreat for those who wanted to stay privately sane, the Beats induced their madness with drugs, with criminal excess, and the pursuits of ecstasy" (Tytell 321). Thus madness through drugs and alcohol became a way to clarity. In this way, drugs and alcohol are used subversively akin to how alcohol is used by Venichka – to subvert the dominant narrative and to create a different kind of experience which is denied by the society.

The importance of the Beat Generation as a countercultural movement has been well documented and discussed and is not the aim of this work. So I will turn my attention to the most celebrated figure of the Beat Generation, Jack Kerouac – King of the Beats – and how alcohol in his work and life functions as a potential site of subversion.

The central work of the Beat Generation is Kerouac's On the Road, a largely autobiographical novel that chronicles Kerouac's trips across America with Neal Cassady, who is transformed in the text into the archetypal misfit Dean Moriarty. The novel introduced the Beat Generation to the public and caused an eruption of media interest in the Beats. The phrase 'Beat Generation' was coined

by Kerouac to characterize a new consciousness shared by the group. The term *beat* was not invented by Kerouac. He heard it on the streets and it became for him "a shorthand for a complex of attitudes he saw himself sharing with the many others who felt cast aside by the modern industrial state" (Dardess 287). Beat marks weariness with conformity and celebration of spontaneity, being down-and-out, disillusioned but also rebellious and restless. When asked to describe the new attitude by John Clellon Holmes, Kerouac answered:

> It's a sort of furtiveness . . . . Like we were a generation of furtives. You know, with an inner knowledge there's no use flaunting on that level, the level of the 'public,' a kind of beatness---I mean, being right down to it, to ourselves, because we all *really* know where we are---and a weariness with all the forms, all the conventions of the world . . . It's something like that. So I guess you might say we're a *beat* generation. (Qtd. in Charters 172).

Beats were outcasts, "exiles within a hostile culture, freaky progenitors of new attitudes toward sanity and ethics, rejected artists writing anonymously for themselves" (Tytell 315). Later, Kerouac added other meanings to the term "beat," significantly his insistence that it meant "beatific." This switch came after Kerouac became a public personality, increasingly disillusioned with the public reception of him. While people looked at Kerouac as if he were the Beat Generation, he distanced himself from the rest of the group and "insisted that he alone understood it [the term beat generation]. It meant 'beatific', trying to be in a

state of beatitude, like St. Francis, trying to love all life, being utterly sincere and kind and cultivating 'joy of heart'" (Charters 298). Kerouac was uneasy with his role as the spokesperson for the group because he had remained throughout his life apolitical, conservative, and a sincere Catholic. Other Beats, in particular Allen Ginsberg, were political and intellectual. But Kerouac abhorred intellectualism, abstraction, and what he called the white myth of Reason. In a characteristic dichotomy which also characterizes other aspects of Kerouac's writings, Kerouac despised mere indulgence of self "at the expense of traditional American values of patriotism and decency" (Dardess 302). Furthermore, Kerouac wished to be known as a great writer rather than just a Beat – the media's focus on him as a chronicler and representative of the movement ignored his achievements as a writer. His changing understanding of the term "beat" reflects his increasing distance from the group and, consequently, from his role in the Beat counterculture.

Kerouac's rebellion is not political and radical but is rather premised on the founding myths of America. His countercultural role rests on the American ideals of radical individualism and continues the tradition of the self going back to Whitman, Emerson, and Thoreau. It is not social but individual – an apolitical liberation of experience. Kerouac's method as a writer was based on what he called "spontaneous prose," an extension of his quest for authentic experience. Spontaneous writing is a method based on improvisation and on the rhythms of bebop – it is "spontaneous bop prosody," as Ginsberg called it in the dedication to

"Howl" (qtd. in Charters 261). Kerouac wrote in long sessions, usually fuelled by benzadrine, without any revisions, attempting to tap into the pure experience. He would type his novels on teletype rolls so as to prevent interruptions of changing the sheets of paper. Regarding his search for spontaneous prose, Kerouac wrote to John Clellon Holmes that he wanted a "deep form, poetic form, the way consciousness *really* digs everything that happens" (qtd. in Dardess 291). To Kerouac, spontaneous prose is a new kind of literature. It is a way of focusing on immediate rather than derivative experience and is, therefore, a revolt against the mechanized life of the modern society. Kerouac's writing is "committed to an effort to give the essence of the emotion or subject while at the same time avoiding conventional novelistic patterns" (Newhouse 62). Spontaneous prose is an attempt to find a new way to describe experiences, capturing them from within. This method emerged from Kerouac's rejection of abstraction; in his writing he does not disassociate life from art and his novels are mostly autobiographical. The identity of life and art is a consequence of Kerouac's commitment to individualism and authentic experience. In Satori in Paris Kerouac writes,

> But as I say I don't know how I got that Satori and the only thing to do is start at the beginning and maybe I'll find out right at the pivot of the story and go rejoicing to the end of it, the tale that's told for no other reason but companionship, which is another (and my favorite) definition of literature, the tale that's told for companionship and to teach something religious, of religious

> reverence, about real life, in this real world which literature should (and here does) reflect.
>
> In other words, and after this I'll shut up, made-up stories and romances about what would happen IF are for children and adult cretins who are afraid to read themselves in a book just as they might be afraid to look in the mirror when they're sick or injured or hungover or *insane*. (10)

Literature cannot be fabrication because that would be exactly the same kind of inauthenticity that the Beat Generation sees in the modern middle-class society, too complacent to confront reality. Kerouac's spontaneous writing is a means of subversion but at the same time it is based on the very American idealistic values of personal freedom. It does not liberate the way Venichka's heteroglossic narrative does. Spontaneous prose, premised on individual freedom and describing individual experiences, cannot result in any kind of social resistance the way the communal carnival does in Moskva-Petushki. This same paradox of a rebellion based on the foundations of the dominant ideology is also manifested in the much discussed element of Kerouac's writing – the travel narrative.

The main feature of Kerouac's writing is of course travel and it is the most discussed theme. Travel in Kerouac is a form of a quest; it protests the hypocrisies of modern society as it draws on the traditions of self-explorations going back to the founding myth of the pioneers. The form of travel in Kerouac's writing is in stark contrast to Venichka's train journey. The train is restricted by the tracks

carrying it forward within the official sphere. Venichka's subversion is a pocket created within a sanctioned vehicle, thus reflecting the teleological and deterministic dominant ideology. Kerouac faces no such restrictions. Travel by car is non-linear and has no destination as limitless detours are possible. Car travel epitomizes the ideas of American freedom and reflects the American ideology of radical individualism. It links to the frontier myth, ever present in Kerouac's writing, as car is reminiscent of the pioneer wagons. In On the Road, Sal Paradise is too late to join the covered wagons, but before setting off on his first journey West, he pours over the books about the pioneers, recasting his upcoming journey in light of their experiences. His plan to recreate the pioneer experience, however, soon runs into problems, as his start leads nowhere and he is forced to return to New York. Despite this, in Kerouac the road releases the individual from social structures, while Venichka's train is always bound by them. The road becomes a search for new values, while at the same time looking back at the values upon which the myth of America is based. At the end, however, Kerouac faces despair and loneliness as the American dream remains elusive and, in his own words, he finally realized that he was "beginning to cross and recross towns in America as though I were a traveling salesman – raggedy travelings, bad stock, rotten beans in the bottom of my bag of tricks, nobody buying" (qtd. in Charters 116). These then are the observations on travel in Kerouac that fall in line with the hegemonic meaning. Because the rebellion in On the Road is based on residual meanings, the dominant culture can selectively absorb them into itself.

But the meaning of travel in On the Road goes further than that, incorporating subversive elements which cast the car journey in a different light.

Kris Lackey discusses the differences between travel by car and travel by train in Road Frames. He writes that in the mind of motorists, they were freed from the constraints of the train but, more than that, "like the trappers and clerics and soldiers who had come before, they traveled with crude maps or none at all and braved cruel terrain and crueler weather" (3). But, Lackey continues, a car is also a commodity which participates in a complicated network of "design, production, distribution, repair, fuel, and highways" (4). Such a network reproduces the process of "moving goods and people en masse farther west" (4). Regardless of the symbolic freedom offered by car travel, it still exists within a certain official system. This side of car travel, however, is subverted in On the Road as Dean Moriarty travels illicitly, stealing cars and disobeying the laws of the highway. Similarly to Venichka, Dean and Sal create their own rules of travel within the official meanings. The subversion goes even further. Despite the officially mediated meanings of road travel as a search for self and as a recreation of the pioneer myth, alcoholic travel adds a different facet to the meaning created.

Dean and Sal, drinking and traveling by car, subvert the meanings of travel which are based on individuality and self-discovery. Drinking alters the quest – it cannot result in a purposeful journey but rather recreates it as a wandering. Dean and Sal join the vagabonds who move about without an objective, just for the sake of moving. It is not so much a quest as an escape from

one. As they crisscross the country, they create a carnival, parodying the quest myth. Furthermore, their wanderings are not part of an individual search for self; rather they create a community. Their drinking results in a communal connection between them and other drinkers and travelers of their group. Kerouac redefined the road genre, creating a new paradigm. As with the other countercultural elements in Kerouac's writing, the road narrative is linked to an older road tradition but it is modified into something new for a newly disillusioned generation:

> Kerouac's nomads are runaways like Huck Finn, adventurers like Ahab, and radicals like Emerson, Whitman, and Thoreau. It wasn't that Kerouac and his Beat cohorts introduced so much that was new in the road tradition, but they did synthesize a wide range of themes and techniques in ways no one else had yet managed. Although Kerouac's heroes were dropouts and runaways, they created a community of protestors who, in their irreverence, opened up the quest romance, the picaresque, and the pilgrimage to ever-wider audiences. In Kerouac's hands the potential of the road quest was social as the form broke new ground for new readers. (Primeau 26)

In Kerouac, the drinking both reinvents and destructs the self. While the trope of the quest heralds back to the American values, Sal and Dean's quest is a quest of self-destruction, alternative reality, and purposelessness. Alcohol gives their

travel a quality of excess through which they evade social control. Thus, they drive recklessly, under the influence, without restraint.

How travel and drinking are written about changes in Kerouac's later works, in particular in Big Sur. The festive and irreverent mood is gone and is replaced by a brooding descent into darkness. This shift in the perception of drinking is due to a split in the image of Kerouac – the Kerouac of On the Road, a countercultural icon, and the Kerouac of the media, the biographical person. In America, the ideology of capitalism can accommodate resistance as long as it remains personal. There has always been on the part of the dominant culture in America an "urge to admire the marginal experience for its freedom at the same time as [it seeks] to neutralize outsiders as a threat to civilization. American fiction has reserved a special place for the outcast whose life is written and read about by those who least resemble him" (Newhouse 10). The outcast can be accommodated in America because in capitalism social groups are fragmented into individuals, leaving no room for social cohesion. The figure of the outcast is precisely that individual, removed from society, creating his or her own subversiveness. It is resistance based not on social consciousness but on radical individuality. The dissenter who is part of a movement, who is socially conscious, is a threat because a social movement can create an oppositional meaning with a revolutionary potential. But an outcast can be, at least partially, appropriated into the ideology, creating only an alternative meaning. Drinking in Moskva-Petushki provides a site of resistance against the totalitarian ideology. In the absence of an

explicit official ideology and in a society that is premised on freedom and self-determination, drinking as resistance becomes much more problematic. Kerouac belongs to a tradition of alcoholic writers who rebel against the perceived oppressiveness of society. Their rebellion, just as the capitalist values, eschews government and social structures and focuses on the individual right to self-determination. This uneasy relationship between the rebellion and the society, as well as between rebellion and drinking, creates several problems for analyzing Kerouac's alcoholism in terms of subversion. Because the dominant society is able to incorporate parts of the residual alternative meanings created in Kerouac's writing, these meanings cannot be effectively oppositional. The incorporation takes a form of focusing on the individualistic elements present in Kerouac and recasting them in terms of the dominant ideology. Thus, Kerouac is presented by the hegemonic culture as an individual, the focus shifted from the symbolic potential of his writing to him as a person.

Kerouac always wanted to be recognized for being a great writer rather than for being a celebrity personality. But his writing was neglected and critically unappreciated. Kerouac's image of himself as a genius of Joycean proportions soon came in conflict with the public's lack of interest in him as a writer. Instead, the media focused on him as the King of the Beats. To his enthusiastic readers, he became a romantic ideal, a symbol, an archetypal rebel crisscrossing America on wild rides down the highway. But this was a fantasy much different from the reality – "all over America highschool and college kids thinking 'Jack Duluoz is

26 years old and on the road all the time hitch hiking' while there I am almost 40 years old, bored and jaded in a roomette bunk crashin across that Salt Flat" (Kerouac, Big Sur 5). Kerouac was aware of this incongruity between the image and the reality, between his art and his life. He was forced to acknowledge "the rupture between the image of himself dramatized in his books and his present knowledge of what that self was becoming; and he was resentful of and finally even frightened by those admirers who, unaware that such a rupture existed, treated him as if the image and the changing reality were one" (Dardess 300). While his admirers wanted to meet Sal Paradise of On the Road, who became symbolic of countercultural rebellion, the critics wanted to meet the King of the Beats and not Kerouac the writer. In Big Sur the disillusioned Kerouac describes his thoughts on meeting one of his admirers:

> Because after all the poor kid actually believes that there's something noble and idealistic and kind about all this beat stuff, and I'm supposed to be the King of the Beatniks according to the newspapers, so but at the same time I'm sick and tired of all the endless enthusiasms of new young kids trying to know me and pour out all their lives into me so that I'll jump up and down and say yes yes that's right, which I cant do anymore-----My reason for coming to Big Sur for the summer being precisely to get away from that sort of thing-----Like those pathetic five highschool kids who all came to my door in Long Island one night wearing jackets

> that said "Dharma Bums" on them, all expecting me to be 25 years old according to a mistake on a book jacket and here I am old enough to be their father-----(109-10)

Anything Kerouac had to say about writing or the Beats was not taken seriously because the Beat Generation was "condemned as a gang of subversives, deviants, and juvenile delinquents" (Dardess 279), thus discrediting any serious assessment of Kerouac's writings. More than that, however, there was the public disaster and embarrassment of Kerouac himself. While his fame as a Beat was growing, Kerouac's books were receiving bad reviews. His popularity also isolated him from the other Beats and he began drinking more heavily. His drinking was becoming uncontrollable and "in order to face the interviews and public appearances he inevitably got drunk, and when he was drunk he was usually a shamble: out of control, maudlin, sentimental and childish" (Charters 299). In the public eye, he became a parody of himself. By the 1960, the press grew tired of the Beat revolution and a backlash began as the Beats became demonized: their "desecration of propriety, the rampant drug use, [and] the contribution to the moral decay of society" were decried by publications from Partisan Review to Playboy (Dittman 89).

By focusing on Kerouac the person rather than Kerouac the writer, the media brought his ideas from an abstract to an individual level. This is partly what Kerouac's (largely autobiographical) writing advocates but it also has the effect of discrediting him. Through the focus on Kerouac as a celebrity, the subversive

potential of his work is negated. To his readers, Kerouac became a symbol of "youth and freedom, riding with Cassady over American highways chasing after the great American adventure – freedom and open spaces, the chance to be yourself, to be free" (Charters 291). A symbol can become a common point of resistance for a social movement. But Kerouac's biography and work became inextricably mixed, always focusing on Kerouac the individual. Discussions of Kerouac, and Kerouac and alcohol specifically, inevitably mention the manner of his death: he died from an abdominal hemorrhage, a common cause of death among alcoholics, in 1969 at the age of 49. This detail of Kerouac's life neutralizes the subversive potential of alcohol. Rather than being a countercultural symbol, Kerouac becomes just an alcoholic who died from his addiction. This is in sharp contrast with Venedikt Erofeev whose biography has been muddled and fabricated by Erofeev himself. Thus, Erofeev becomes a myth, his drinking reaching legendary proportions. While we have sketchy biographical data for Erofeev, it never interferes with the legend. On the contrary, it reinforces the myth of Venichka, his namesake protagonist, just as the myth of Venichka reinforces the myth of Erofeev. Because Erofeev remains a legend, his personal life need not interfere with his work.

In the case of Erofeev and the Soviet Union, anonymity was essential because a dissident writer faced the possibility of incarceration or death if he was discovered. The state used coercive strategies of dealing with dissent because the official ideology was not flexible enough to deal with dissent through selective

incorporation. In America, however, even a dissenter can be a celebrity as liberal capitalism is able to use alternative meanings to its advantage, reinforcing its own hegemonic meanings. Looking at the man instead of his writing lessens the impact of Kerouac's work by bringing the rebellion to an individual level; the individual, even if a dissenter, is not a social movement. In Big Sur, the results of the individualization of Kerouac become evident as he himself is now torn between the rebellion of seeing alcohol as a means to creative madness and the conformity of seeing drinking as pathology.

Alcohol is not central to Kerouac's writings, with the exception of Big Sur. It is not a principal element in the majority of his writings, even though it is present in abundance (but only as one of many transgressive substances). In On the Road, Sal Paradise and his friends drink much and often but alcohol is never pivotal to the narrative. Kerouac also for the most part did not use alcohol for inspiration, rather relying on Benzedrine and marijuana as a stimulant while writing (Wedge 246). In Big Sur, however, we get a look at Kerouac the alcoholic, as he chronicles his descent into delirium tremens while visiting California. In this novel, the picture of Kerouac is completely changed from Sal Paradise of On the Road; he is no longer the rebel cruising down the highway but an alcoholic disillusioned with his celebrity status. According to Thomas Newhouse, Big Sur "is a tragic document of a single man's mental collapse, but it presaged the terms for dissolution of an entire cultural movement years before either its utopian idealism or its ultimate fall would gain public attention" (159).

Still, the echoes of rebellion are still there. While he explicitly speaks of delirium tremens using the medical paradigm of alcoholism, Kerouac desperately clings to the link between alcohol and creativity:

> My old thoughts about the slit of a billion years covering all this and all cities and generations eventually is just a dumb old thought, 'Only a silly sober fool could think it, imagine gloating over such nonsense' (because in one sense the drinker learns wisdom, in the words of Goethe or Blake or whichever it was 'The pathway to wisdom lies through excess')-----But in this condition you can only say 'Wisdom is just another way to make people sick'-----'I'm SICK' I yell emphatically to the trees, to the woods around, to the hills above, looking around desperately, nobody cares----- . (113)

Kerouac is still linking alcohol and the Beat attitudes but is now conceding the problematic nature of drinking by diagnosing it as a disease. Far from being the archetypal outcast, he now embraces the dominant view of excessive alcohol consumption as a problematic addiction. His drinking binge is pointless; it is not part of a great American adventure, of a quest of subversion. He came to the cabin in Big Sur to be alone and to write in an attempt to have another great adventure. Instead he starts off with a drinking spree and, when he finally gets to the cabin, he quickly gets bored and leaves for the city where more alcohol awaits. In this novel, Kerouac is a central character, no longer focusing on subversive outcasts such as Dean Moriarty and Japhy Ryder. Others are secondary characters in his

drunken world. The communal spirit is lost, leaving only Kerouac with his drunkenness and misery. There are still passages denouncing the society and middle class conformity, but they do not have the urgency of On the Road or the spirituality of Dharma Bums. Partly this is because they are not uttered by others, and are not part of the subversive search for self. They now read as diatribes, desperate attempts to add meaning to his alcoholic experience:

> Not so much that I'm a drunkard that I feel guilty about but that others who occupy this plane of "life on earth" with me dont feel guilty at all-----...I feel guilty for being a member of the human race-----Drunkard yes and one of the worst fools on earth-----In fact not even a genuine drunkard just a fool ... a perfectly obvious fool American writer doing just that not only for a living (which I was always able to glean anyway from railroad and ship and lifting boards and sacks with humble hand) but because if I dont write what actually I see happening in this unhappy globe which is rounded by the contours of my deathskull I think I'll have been sent on earth by poor God for nothing. (165-7)

Nevertheless, he ends the novel, after the terrifying description of his hallucinations and paranoia, on a positive note, seeing his descent into madness as a sort of stimulus and rejuvenation. His next novel, Satori in Paris, continues this attempt to reconceptualize his drinking and to recapture some of the subversive spirit evident in On the Road. Satori in Paris chronicles Kerouac's ten-day trip to

Paris and Brittany to research his ancestry. He insists that he is a descendant of the French aristocracy, which makes him legendary in his mind and sets him apart from the other Beats. This highlights the tension between his vision of himself as a legend and the demystification of Kerouac as a symbol created by the focus on him as an the individual in the media. During his visit to France, he quickly descends into a bout of drinking, finding nothing, and finally rushing to return home. The novel is light and quite comic but it does contain many digressions on Kerouac the author and Kerouac the drinker:

> Methinks women love me and then they realize I'm drunk for all the world and this makes them realize I cant concentrate on them alone, for long, makes them jealous, and I'm a fool in Love With God. Yes. (25)
>
> My manners, abominable at times, can be sweet. As I grew older I became a drunk. Why? Because I like ecstasy of the mind. I'm a Wretch.
>
> But I love love. (28)

Kerouac glorifies his drinking in spiritual terms, calling it the ecstasy of the mind but the truth is that the subversive potential of alcohol is no longer present in these late works. Partly this is because Kerouac himself rejected his connections with the Beats after the disillusionment of fame. But it is also because in these novels we now see Kerouac the person and not Kerouac the symbol. He stays positive, nevertheless, continually recreating a fantasy of himself as a

misunderstood genius. In Paris he claims to have experienced satori – sudden enlightenment – and returns to America rejuvenated and ready to resume his work.

In his later years, as evidenced by the two novels discussed above, Kerouac is conflicted about his use of alcohol. His drinking is no longer subversive but becomes merely destructive, without the element of opposition: "Alcohol, for Kerouac, functioned as a source to obliterate the world rather than to get in closer contact with it – an escape from despair, public pressure, and personal inadequacy" (Newhouse 157). After his disillusionment, Kerouac's drinking becomes a personal tragedy and not a vehicle of liberation as he uses alcohol to dull his senses. But he continues to try and reframe his drinking in terms of artistic liberation. However, when his celebrity status has faded, he cannot return to the romantic idealism of On the Road. The subversive power of that work has become appropriated into the mainstream, disarmed and recycled. In Big Sur, Jack Duluoz is "unable to carry on with the things he once celebrated in his youth and his writing" (Newhouse 154). When he attempts to hitchhike, he is faced with the changed American landscape, dominated by the middle class values where there is no place for the misfit wanderer. This passage also shows Kerouac's spontaneous prose to which he was committed to the end but it does not possess the same sense of urgency as in his earlier works:

> This is the first time I've hitch hiked in years and I soon begin to see that things have changed in America, you can't get a

> ride any more (but of course especially on a strictly tourist road like this coast highway with no trucks or business)-----Sleek long stationwagon after wagon comes sleering by smoothly, all colors of the rainbow and pastel at that, pink, blue, white, the husband is in the driver's seat with a long ridiculous vacationist hat with a long baseball visor making him look witless and idiot-----Beside him sit wifey, the boss of America, wearing dark glasses and sneering, even if he wanted to pick me up or anybody up she wouldn't let him-----But in the two deep backseats are children, children, millions of children, all ages, they're fighting and screaming over ice cream, they're spilling vanilla all over the Tartan seatcovers----- ... And if he thinks he wants to explore any of the silent secret roads of America it's no go, the lady in the sneering dark glasses has now become the navigator and sits there sneering over her previously printed blue-lined roadmap distributed by happy executives in neckties to the vacationists of America who would also wear neckties (after having come along so far) but the vacation fashion in sport shirts, long visored hats, dark glasses, pressed slacks and baby's first shoes dipped in gold oil dangling from the dashboard-----. (44-45)

This society of the 60s has no place for Kerouac and his "rucksack revolution," an idea that Americans can abandon the consumer culture and follow the road with

their backpacks. But Kerouac himself has also changed. Instead of a youthful rebel, he is a middle aged drunk. His distance from the other Beats, his celebrity status, the focus on him as a person, and his own conservatism undermine any subversive potential left in him.

Unlike Erofeev, who became a legend, Kerouac became too real. It was not merely because Kerouac was an alcoholic that society managed to discredit him. If he were not an alcoholic or an addict, he could not have been a symbol of rebellion either. Regardless of what image Kerouac presented to the critics, he would still have become quite harmless old news. If Kerouac's writing really had subversive potential, a potential for spearheading a disruptive social movement, he would not have become a celebrity. But because his rebellion was based on residual meanings of being an outcast and searching for freedom it could become absorbed into the mainstream. The more problematic aspects of his countercultural role such as substance abuse were discredited by the presence of Kerouac himself. Alcohol, as a site of resistance, does of course have the same consequences on one's health as alcohol of the medical paradigm – what is different is the interpretation. In the case of Erofeev, Venichka remains a legendary drunk who distributes cocktail recipes that use such ingredients as furniture varnish and eau de cologne and drinks fantastic amounts of alcohol. This is not to say that every Soviet drunk who drank eau de cologne, a popular substitute for alcohol, was a rebel. But the action remains symbolic, signifying the withdrawal of one's body from social control and reclamation of one's control

over self. Paradoxically, once the drinker claims ownership of the self through self-destruction, at some point the element of choice might be lost. This is what happens with Kerouac – in Jack Duluoz of Big Sur and in the public Kerouac we see merely an addict and not a dissenter. The view is too personal and too individual. Dissent must be located in the social groups and not in an individual. The individual interests are still mediated in some degree by the hegemony because individual interests are created through fragmentation.

Conclusion

I have set out to show how alcohol can become a site of resistance in literature and in particular in the writings of Venedikt Erofeev and Jack Kerouac. Alcohol is a major element in Erofeev and Kerouac and both writers are seen as countercultural icons. Linking alcohol with the subversive role of their writings, I have asked what role does drinking play in creating oppositional meanings. Using a Marxist theory of society as my starting point, I have examined how the meaning of drinking is constructed by the dominant culture in both the Soviet Union and the United States and then explored how alcohol consumption in Erofeev and Kerouac's writings subverts that dominant construction.

In Erofeev alcohol liberates language, an ideological tool for mediating meaning, and allows alternative meanings to emerge. Drinking creates carnival, a concept theorized by Bakhtin. Carnival, ushered in by alcohol, erases all social hierarchies and orders, releasing a multitude of meanings and discourses, all of equal validity and importance. The subversive meanings created by carnival cannot be incorporated into the dominant Soviet ideology and, therefore, they act as subversive disruptions. Furthermore, their constant communal character always retains a possibility of social action and revolutionary potential.

In Kerouac alcohol is equally liberating, at first. In On the Road the oppositional meanings, particularly those dealing with car travel, are based on residual cultural elements. But they are reshaped through drinking to subvert the

individualistic, purposeful quest; they become uncontrollable, excessive, purposeless. In later novels by Kerouac, however, this function of alcohol is diluted and nearly lost. Specifically, the role and conceptualization of alcohol in Big Sur falls in line with the dominant meanings while Kerouac still attempts, largely unsuccessfully, to recapture the subversive meaning of drinking present in On the Road. I have argued that this is due to the individualization of Kerouac as a celebrity and a person. While a symbol such as Sal Paradise can lead to socially meaningful resistance, the individual can produce only an alternative meaning. Since the capitalist ideology is premised on radical individualism, the individualistic rebellion can be more or less successfully integrated into the hegemonic meaning. Thus, the potential for oppositional meaning is not realized.

This study has examined only two examples of the role of alcohol in literature and, through it, in society. I have looked at two different cultures with different ideological conceptualizations of alcoholism. Further fruitful investigations can be conducted by exploring how, in what direction, and to what extent the meanings of drinking have shifted within post-Soviet Russia and in today's post drug revolution United States. By analyzing literatures that deal with drinking from the point of the current ideological perspectives in these two societies and comparing them not only to each other but also to the generations that preceded them (such as Erofeev and Kerouac), the success or failure posed by the alcoholic subversion can also be assessed. Regardless of the direction taken, however, the sociological perspective should remain central to any studies in this

area. Alcohol as a possible site of subversion is inherently a sociological topic and must be approached through a historical and social context. Alcohol consumption considered alone cannot lead to a shift in social order. But realizing the social constructedness of the meanings of drinking creates a potential for conceptualizing different possibilities. This is why the link between the subversive potential of alcohol and literature is crucial – it is through literature that the language liberated by alcohol consumption emerges. And through this liberated language, other meanings and realities are allowed to become evident.

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